

Israel outlaws radical Jewish group

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — A Jerusalem court on Wednesday outlawed a Jewish militant group, the Idea Front, on charges it was a terrorist organisation. The court said the Idea Front was simply a new form of the anti-Arab movement Kach, which was outlawed in 1994 after one of its supporters killed 29 Palestinian worshippers

in a Hebron mosque. Most Idea Front members were former Kach militants. The court issued its ruling while rejecting an appeal by the organisation against police orders closing the group's headquarters in Jerusalem 10 weeks ago, officials said. The court action came amid a police crackdown

on Jewish militants suspected of planning anti-Arab attacks or provocations in a bid to prevent government plans to transfer additional West Bank land to the Palestinians. Idea Front leader Itamar Ben Gvir was among a number of right-wing militants barred from entering certain Palestinian areas as part of the crackdown.

Last week police arrested two more far-right activists suspected of planning to throw a pig's head into Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque compound in hopes of sparking Arab-Israeli violence and torpedoing the West Bank troop pullback. Israel Radio said police were on special alert for possible anti-Arab attacks

coinciding with the Holy Month of Ramadan, which began Tuesday. The Idea Front most recently made news when two of its leaders were caught plastering Jerusalem with posters showing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wearing a Palestinian headscarf under the caption "Liar."

Algerian massacres prompt tighter security for Ramadan

ALGIERS (AFP) — Authorities in the Algerian capital announced Wednesday tighter security for the Holy Month of Ramadan amid fears that fresh massacres could lead to an escalation of violence in Algeria. Partial tolls showed more than 330 people were killed in savage attacks, often at roadblocks, in barely 10 days. Ramadan, the month of daytime fasting and abstinence which began on Tuesday, is considered by armed Islamists as propitious to "jihad" or holy war. The last Ramadan, in January and February 1997, resulted in dozens of deaths in the capital from a wave of car bomb blasts blamed on Islamist guerrillas. In a bid to calm fears, the authorities are restricting parking in public places and appealing for vigilance

against terrorist attacks. The government is seeking to bolster security in the capital with parking bans outside mosques, markets, cafes, and cinemas and on arterial roads between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. No parking will be permitted in the "immediate vicinity" of universities, sports clubs, crossroads and other public places, while vehicles over 5.5 tonnes will not be allowed access to the capital of three million people. In spite of the Algerian Interior Ministry's warnings and appeals for vigilance, carried by the media here, people continued to crowd into Algiers marketplaces. After days of reports of mounting bloodshed, mainly in the west of the country, the Algerian press on Wednesday reported relatively minor incidents.

Iran rules out immediate thaw in ties with Egypt

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi on Wednesday ruled out any immediate improvement in ties between Iran and Egypt, saying he was disappointed by President Hosni Mubarak's recent comments about the Islamic Republic. "Egyptian officials are lacking the political will and presently there are no grounds to boost relations between Tehran and Cairo," he said, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported. "Egypt needs more time before it is ready to take serious steps towards improving relations," he said. President Mubarak said Tuesday he was not comfortable with Iran's offer to normalise relations so soon after it had trumpeted its desire to export its Islamist

revolution. "[Iranian President Mohammad] Khatami's remarks are promising, but in order to restore normal relations... I want to be sure that this is not just a manoeuvre but a genuine normalisation of ties," he said. "I want to be clear in my own mind that the relations will not be exploited to recruit [terrorist] elements who make trouble," Mr. Mubarak said, referring to Islamists seeking to overthrow the government and establish an Islamist state. But Mr. Kharazi said President Mubarak's comments were "disappointing and a repeat of past positions. Egyptian officials are still unaware of the realities of Islamic Iran. "What the Islamic world needs at the present time is ever more solidarity and understanding," he said.

Egypt calls on Jordan not to join Israeli-Turkish exercises

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt on Wednesday urged Jordan not to take part in joint Israeli-Turkish-U.S. military exercises in the Mediterranean next month and suggested they should be delayed or cancelled. Asked about Jordan's possible participation as an observer, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa told reporters: "Any form of participation in these manoeuvres is undesirable."

Information Minister Samir Mutawi said Saturday that the government had not yet made a decision on its involvement in the naval manoeuvres that have angered Arab nations and Iran. "Egypt believes these manoeuvres give out a negative message because they are happening at a time of high tension in the region. In this tense atmosphere, these manoeuvres should be cancelled or delayed," Mr. Musa said. Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid told reporters that contacts between Arab nations had been made over the past few days to convince them not to take part. The Reliant Mermaid

exercises are due to be held in territorial waters and international airspace from Jan. 5 to 9 under a military cooperation accord signed by Turkey and Israel in February 1996. The most important part of the exercise, in which the three navies join forces in a mock rescue of a sinking fishing boat, is due to take place on Jan. 7, Turkish military officials say. Ankara insists the sole purpose of the exercise is joint training in air-sea search and rescue and says it is no threat to anyone.



NEW YEAR PARTY: A Lebanese man buys whistles and paper hats for a New Year's party (Reuters photo)

'Magician' Netanyahu looks set to pass Israel's 1998 budget

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrapped up 1997 Wednesday by again confounding doom-sayers with a rash of costly last-minute bargains that looked set to get his budget through parliament and save his fragile government. Rushing to meet a midnight deadline for approval of the 1998 plan, Mr. Netanyahu promised hundreds of millions of dollars in extra spending demanded by members of his fractious eight-party coalition. As the deadline loomed, his success in wooing recalcitrant parties became apparent as the government comfortably won a series of preliminary votes on the budget. Earlier this week Mr. Netanyahu had lost three similar votes due to defections by coalition deputies, raising calls even from senior allies in his Likud Party for the dissolution of parliament and early general elections. Two final readings on the budget legislation itself were scheduled for late Wednesday, before the deadline, although

Israeli parliamentary practice normally allows a 24-hour grace period to actually complete the voting. In Wednesday's vote, only the Geshet Party of Foreign Minister David Levy, which accounts for five of the government's 66 seats in the 120-member parliament, refused to join other coalition members in supporting the government to mark its opposition to proposed cuts in social spending. Mr. Netanyahu supporters described the prime minister as a "magician" for stitching together a majority for his budget, originally a radical austerity plan which called for \$600 million in across-the-board spending cuts. It was just the latest of many narrow political victories in 1997 for Mr. Netanyahu who has repeatedly defied predictions that squabbling among his coalition of religious and right-wing parties would topple the prime minister. But the cost of saving his government looked high — press reports said Mr. Netanyahu promised up to \$900 million in

extra spending, notably to appease far-right and fundamentalist religious parties and to aid Jewish settlers in the Palestinian territories. "The grand oriental bazaar" was how the mass circulation Maariv newspaper described the budget marathon. The annual budget debate is traditionally a time of brinkmanship in Israel's rough-and-tumble world of coalition politics. But Mr. Netanyahu's task has been more arduous this year due to the coupling of strong opposition to his spending cuts with unhappiness on the political right over government plans to carry out a new troop withdrawal from the West Bank. Several far-right coalition deputies have threatened to vote against the budget no matter what its contents in order to topple Mr. Netanyahu and prevent the transfer of more land to the Palestinians. As part of his bargaining, Mr. Netanyahu offered significant new funds for Jewish settlements both to gain support for his budget and counter the far-

right opponents of the troop pullback required under U.S.-backed peace accords. As of midday Friday, Mr. Netanyahu's gamble appeared to have paid off. But economists warned that the long-term price for Israel's already troubled economy could be high. To pay for his last-minute concessions without abandoning his deficit reduction target or raising taxes, they say, Mr. Netanyahu will have to virtually eliminate a planned \$1.2 billion cash reserve fund built into the original budget. The fund is normally used to cover unforeseen expenses, which will now have to be met with future spending or taxes, the analysts said. "Israel starts the New Year in the red," headlined the Yediot Aharonot newspaper, warning that the budget will do nothing to reverse the slowdown in Israel's economic growth or the rise in unemployment, now at a three-year high of more than eight per cent.

Cypriot fisherman who gave British lover AIDS granted early release

NICOSIA (AFP) — A Cypriot fisherman convicted in July of knowingly infecting his British lover with the AIDS virus was granted early release by the authorities here Wednesday. Pavlos Georgiou, a 40-year-old father of four from the resort town of Ayia Napa, who had served just five months of a 15-month prison sentence handed down by a court in the southern port of Larnaca, was one of a number of prisoners to benefit from a New Year amnesty which is a tradition here. His early release followed a public show of forgiveness by his victim, Jeanette Pink, a 45-year-old divorcee from Basildon, Essex in the south-east of England. "I think justice was served when he was found guilty and sent to prison, but it doesn't bother me if

he is released sooner," she told the London tabloid The Daily Mail. Three months ago Georgiou applied for a presidential pardon on the grounds that imprisonment had seriously affected his health and was denying his children their father. Georgiou's wife died of AIDS-related diseases three years ago and his five-year-old son also carries the Human Immune Deficiency Virus, HIV, which can develop into full-blown AIDS. Ms. Pink, who was given less than two years to live at her trial this summer, told the Mail that she was feeling much better. She attributed the improvement to combination therapy, a treatment for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome involving a cocktail of palliative drugs.

JORDAN TELEVISION	
Tel. 773111-19	
PROGRAMME TWO	
Thursday Programmes	
14:10	Peter Rabbit
14:30	Hollywood Stunt Makers
15:00	What Would You Do?
15:40	The Legend of Gatorface
16:30	Film
17:00	French Programmes
19:00	News in French
19:30	News Headlines
19:35	Trivial Pursuit
20:00	The Parenthood
21:10	Film — "The Pirate Prince"
22:00	News in English
22:30	The Wall
23:15	Concert
23:59	Film
Friday Programmes	
14:10	The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin
14:30	The New Fred and Barney Show
15:00	Wishbone
15:30	Lucky Luke
16:00	Family Matters
16:20	Doc. — Natural Wonders of Europe
17:00	French Programmes
19:30	News Headlines
19:35	Doc. — Life on the Internet
20:00	Comedy — Are You Being Served
20:30	Brisco County
21:10	Doc. — Horizon
22:00	News in English
22:30	Feature film — "Boom Town"
PRAYER TIMES	
05:09	Fajr
06:31	(Sunrise) Duha

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

11:39	Dhuhr
14:24	Asr
16:47	Maghreb
18:09	Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church	Sweetfish, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.	632785
St. Joseph Church Tel.	634590
Church of the Annunciation	Tel. 637440
De la Salle Church Tel.	661757
Terra Sancta Church Tel.	622366
Anglican Church Tel.	652826
Armenian Catholic Church Tel.	771331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel.	775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel.	771751
Armenian International Church	Tel. 865897
Evangelical Lutheran Church	Tel. 824328
German-speaking Evangelical	Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel.	654932
Church of Nazarene Tel.	675691
The Evangelical Local Church	in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking	Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology. Skies will be partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers in the central and northern part of the Kingdom. Winds will be northwesterly moderate. In Aqaba winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman	07/13
Aqaba	10/21
Deserts	04/15
Jordan Valley	10/21

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 13, Aqaba 21. Humidity readings: Amman 43 per cent. Aqaba 31 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY	
AMMAN:	
Dr. Yahya Abdul Rahim	736072
Dr. Nasser Ibrahim	830432
Dr. Bahjat Bader	832642
Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi	893542
Firas pharmacy	661912
Ferdows pharmacy	778336
Al Asema pharmacy	637055
Nairookh pharmacy	623672
Al Salam pharmacy	626730
Yaacoub pharmacy	644945
Shmeisani pharmacy	637660
Najib pharmacy	847632
IRBID:	

Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh	250080
Al Quds pharmacy	(—)
ZARQA:	
Dr. Walid Nabhan	995743

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre	637111
Civil Defence Department	661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue	630341
Civil Defence Emergency	199
Rescue Police 192	621111
637777	
Fire Brigade	617101
Blood Bank	775121
Highway Police	843402
Traffic Police	896390
Public Security Department	630321
Hotel Complaints	605800
Price Complaints	661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints	897467
Amman Municipality Complaints	787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)	121
Overseas Calls	010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs	623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs	661101
Jordan Television	773111
Radio Jordan	774111
Water Authority	680100
Jordan Electricity Authority	815615
Electric Power Company	

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:	
Hussein Medical Centre	813813/32
Khalidi Maternity	644281/6
Alshah Maternity	612441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity	642362
Malhas, J. Amman	636140
Palestine, Shmeisani	607071
Shmeisani Hospital	669131
University Hospital	845845
Al-Muasher Hospital	667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali	666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali	664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen	777101/3
Al-Bashir	775111/26
Army, Marka	891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital	602240/50
Amal Hospital	674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery	865109
ZARQA:	
Zarqa Govt. Hospital	09983323
Zarqa National Hospital	09980560
Ibn Sina Hospital	09986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital	09990990
IRBID:	
Princess Basma Hospital	

02275555	
Greek Catholic Hospital	02272725
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital	02247100
AQABA:	
Princess Haya Hospital	03314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights	
08:00	Sanaa (RJ)
08:25	Bombay (RJ)
09:15	Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30	New Delhi (RJ)
10:45	Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:45	Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:45	Beirut (RJ)
13:20	Colombo (RJ)
15:00	Moscow (RJ)
16:25	New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:05	London (RJ)
18:05	Athens (RJ)
18:05	Kuwait (RJ)
18:55	Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)

19:05	Abu Dhabi, Al Ain (RJ)
21:00	Kuala Lumpur (add) (RJ)
21:00	Moscow (RJ)
22:15	Jeddah (add) (RJ)
22:50	Larnaca (RJ)
23:45	Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

13:15	Riyadh (SV)
14:10	Shanghai (AH)
15:00	Doha (QR)
15:20	Muscat, Doha (GF)
16:00	Dubai (EK)
16:30	Rome (AZ)
20:00	Tel Aviv (MS)
20:40	Cairo (MS)
23:10	Istanbul (TK)
23:30	London, Beirut (BA)

Royal Wings (RW)

(For Thursday and Friday)	
07:45	Aqaba (RW)
09:05	Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50	Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:20	Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30	Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20	Aqaba (RW)
22:50	Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights	

Queen Alia Fund inaugurates Ramadan charity programme

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF) has inaugurated this year's Ramadan Charity Campaign (RCC), which is designed to collect contributions for needy families and provide them with direct cash, in-kind assistance, or initial financing for income generating projects.

The annual campaign, which began on Tuesday, the first day of Ramadan, this year is focusing attention in particular on supplying needy families with equipment, machines, or other necessary elements for starting a small business to earn a living, according to a QAF spokesperson.

QAF President HRH Princess Basma initiated the annual campaign in 1991 to serve as an expression of social solidarity among the Jordanian community.

Thousands of school-children, boy scouts, and members of youth clubs, as well as QAF officials, are involved in the month-long fundraising activities in different parts of the country.

In previous years, charity work has taken the form of paying school fees for needy students, funding vocational training pro-



Queen Alia Fund for Social Development President HRH Princess Basma

grammes, buying equipment and livestock to help families earn a living, financing collectives, buying wheelchairs for the handicapped, and many other forms of assistance.

However, the organisers said the focus this year will be on raising funds and then providing lump sums to able-bodied family heads to start small-scale businesses to earn a living, rather than relying on charity from non-governmental charitable organisations.

This year, the spokesperson said, the collection of cash will be partly used to

buy medical equipment for hospitals and health centres in the remote regions of Jordan so that local needy patients can receive free medical attention.

The donations will this year also finance the purchase of hearing aids for needy people with hearing problems, sheep for people interested in farming, and clothes and school bags for children, in addition to financial aid, he added.

The higher committee in charge of QAF activities endorsed a programme for delivering the assistance to the needy during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

The committee will hold a meeting Saturday, at which time Princess Basma is scheduled to share an iftar banquet with a large number of orphaned children.

QAF sources said large numbers of voluntary groups including the Hashemite Medical Team, the Great Arab Revolt Club, the Care for the Children Society, and youth scouts will take part in these activities.

Since the inception of the charity campaign, QAF has collected JD1.3 million in cash and in-kind contributions, benefiting some 750,000 persons.

Woman's appointment to municipality position hailed as important step

By Ramadan Rawashdeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordanian women's groups have hailed the appointment of a woman as head of an important section in the Amman Municipality as a positive step in the right direction.

Anwar Ali Mismar, an engineer, has been appointed by Amman Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi as director of the municipality's research and development department.

"The appointment is one more step towards raising the status of Jordanian women to reach the decision-making level," according to Amneh Zoubi, president of the Jordanian Women's Union.

However, she said, this is just a single step and it does not mean an end to the women's struggle. She demanded that the country develop clear legislation guaranteeing women's right and enabling them to assume decision-making posts and enjoy equal rights with men.

Ms. Mismar, who has worked with the municipality for 17 years and is now the head of a section connected with designs and studies, said she was surprised at the appointment to the position. But she said the decision reflected the municipality council's keenness on enabling dedicated women with proven work experience to reach advanced positions in the municipality's administration.

Ms. Mismar pledged to do everything in her power to help further develop the research and development department.

"The decision is unprecedented and indicates that women are now proving their eligibility for assuming leading positions. I expect other women colleagues to reach advanced positions," she said.

Her male colleagues have expressed delight at the appointment and have stated that the municipal council appreciates dedicated people, she added.

Ms. Mismar, who holds a

BA degree in electrical engineering from Baghdad University, said Jordanian women should be granted the opportunity to assume leading positions in various public and private organisations.

At least 619 females are employed by the Amman Municipality, but this appointment marks the first time that a woman has assumed such a leading post.

For his part, Dr. Abbadi said it will not be the last time for a woman to assume such an important post, adding that the appointment of Engineer Mismar means that women can and should assume decision-making roles in society.

Speaking upon visiting Ms. Mismar to congratulate her on her new post, Dr. Abbadi expressed hope that the research and development department will focus attention on reducing routine, introducing modern methods for work, and developing ideas for offering better and quicker service to the public.

Gas distributors postpone strike following 'partial' government approval of demands

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Petrol stations and gas cylinder distributors have postponed a strike today following the government's "partial" approval of their demands, according to a spokesperson of the distributors Wednesday.

Mohammad Qaisi, chairperson of the Petrol Stations and Gas Cylinder Distributors Association, said the decision by the distributors was taken after a meeting Wednesday with Deputies Jawad Anani and Abdullah Ensour.

"We decided to postpone our strike to see if the Cabinet's decision meets part of

our demands," Mr. Qaisi told the Jordan Times.

"Government officials told us that a decision to this effect will be issued either Saturday or Sunday. In return, we agreed to postpone our strike for six months or until our other demands are met," added Mr. Qaisi.

The decision to strike by 250 petrol stations and 900 gas cylinder distributors was made earlier this week to pressure the government to raise the commission they receive from the Jordan Petroleum Refinery (JPR) for oil and gas quantities they sell.

The current commission system, effective since 1963, stipulates that gas distribu-

tors receive 18 per cent, or 350 fils, from the total price of each gas cylinder, and 1 per cent from the total cost of each litre of oil, diesel, and kerosene.

Mr. Qaisi said the government has agreed to raise the commission that the distributors receive. He declined to reveal the rate of the commission they were promised, but said it was "satisfactory."

"What the government has promised is less than we were asking. But we will wait and see what the government will do in the coming few days," added Mr. Qaisi, who held talks with Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Mohammad Saleh Horani prior to his meeting with Drs. Anani and

Ensour.

When asked whether the new changes will raise the prices of gas and oil for consumers, Mr. Qaisi replied that "the government should answer this question."

"The issue is not over. We will continue our negotiations with the government until all our demands are met," Mr. Qaisi said.

Following the meeting with the gas and oil distributors, Dr. Horani told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that the government understands the reason behind the distributors' demands to raise the commission.

"We intend to handle these demands in a just and objective manner," the minister told the agency.

He told Petra that he urged the distributors to take the necessary measures to ensure public safety and offer the best services.

Mr. Horani said his ministry has presented a report to the Cabinet on the whole issue, and as a result, "there is no need for a strike."

The report recommended a "raise in the commission, which will become effective after approval by the Council of Ministers," he said.

The deal between the government and the distributors came several days after the renewal of the oil agreement with Iraq, under which the Kingdom receives about 50 per cent of its oil and gas supplies free of charge.

Two receive 15-year sentences for murder

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Criminal Court Wednesday sentenced a 55-year-old man to a 15-year imprisonment term with hard labour for murdering his daughter in Karak in March 1996.

After a six-month trial, the court found Salem Hassan, a shepherd, guilty of killing his 15-year-old daughter Malha in a rural district of the Karak governorate on March 8, 1997.

According to court documents, on the evening of the incident, Mr. Hassan asked his daughter to tie up their donkey outside his tent.

The victim left for two hours, and when her father went to check on her delay, he saw a man walking 40 metres away from her in the pasture, the court said.

When Mr. Hassan asked his daughter to explain the matter, the court said, she denied having a relationship with anyone and said she did not know the shepherd, describing him as "simply a passer-by."

"Her father, however, did not believe her and struck her ten times with a three-kilogramme flint stone on her head. He made sure that she was dead, then went and turned himself in to the police, claiming it was a crime of honour," the court said.

However, the three-member tribunal did not believe the man's claims that he killed his daughter for honour, because "forensic examination of the victim determined that no sexual relations had taken place."

Also Wednesday, the same court sentenced a 35-year-old woman to 15 years in prison for killing another woman in Mafraq in 1996.

Fatmeh Mohammad was found guilty of murdering her best friend, Thawabeh Saleh, 42, on Oct. 3, 1996 in the Khaldieh village, located between Mafraq and Zarqa.

According to court documents, during an argument the two women were having,

Ms. Mohammad pushed her friend to the wall, against which she struck her head and fell.

"Ms. Mohammad then brought out a hammer and struck her friend several times on the head until she died," the court said.

Both verdicts, handed down by Justices Abdul Hamid Sa'ad, Yassin Abdulat, and Ahmad Khatib, will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation within the next 30 days.

University, scientific society sign cooperation agreement

RAMTHA (Petra) — The Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), located in Ramtha, and the Royal Scientific Society (RSS) Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in applied chemical sciences.

The memorandum, signed by JUST President Sa'ad Hijazi and RSS President Sa'id Aloush, provides for the exchange of expertise and scientific information in the field of local chemical industries and the needs of factories. It also provides for joint supervision of post-graduate students' theses and associated work.

The two sides also agreed that their respective facilities will be placed at the disposal of postgraduate students to conduct research in industrial chemistry and that scientists from both organisations will supervise these students' work.

In remarks at the signing ceremony, held at JUST, Dr. Hijazi said the memorandum will open the way for researchers to put theory into practice and contribute to solving problems facing local chemical industries.

He stated that as of the current academic year, JUST has introduced an MA programme in applied industrial chemistry, focusing mainly on environmental issues, problems resulting from the use of pesticides, and ways of disposing of industrial chemical waste.

Dr. Aloush noted that the RSS is seeking to catch up with advanced nations in the fields of science and technology and is struggling to contribute to improving the quality of Jordanian products, thus enabling them to become competitive in world markets.

Stressing the need for national scientific institutions to play a greater role in offering expertise and consultation to the various industrial sectors, Dr. Aloush added that it is of paramount importance to draw a balance between protecting the environment and expanding industrialisation.

24-year-old man sentenced to death for murder

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Criminal Court has sentenced a 24-year-old man to death after he was found guilty of killing and robbing a man in Aqaba in February 1997.

The court found Firas Issam guilty of the premeditated murder of Mohammad Qatawneh, 53, on Feb. 5.

The same court acquitted Mr. Issam's brother, Fadi, 21, of complicity to the premeditated murder and ordered that he be set free.

According to court transcripts, Firas Issam met Mr. Qatawneh in Aqaba, took up residence with him, and later took JD343 belonging to him. When the victim discovered the theft, he asked for his money.

"But Firas, unable to return the money, plotted to kill him and bought a gun for this purpose," the court said.

On the morning of the incident, the court maintained, Firas and his brother Fadi slept in Mr. Qatawneh's apartment, and "when the victim fell asleep, Firas drew his gun and shot him three times in the head. He then robbed him of JD600 and fled with his brother."

In its ruling, however, the court said it decided to acquit Fadi because "he had no knowledge of what his brother was plotting."

The verdict, which was handed down by Judges Abdul Hamid Sa'ad, Yassin

Abdullah, and Ahmad Khatib on Dec. 28, will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation within the next 30 days.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International (AI), has issued a statement urging activists to appeal to His Majesty King Hussein and the Jordanian government to commute a recent death sentence issued last month against a 19-year-old man.

Ayed Abdul Karim was sentenced to death by the Criminal Court on Dec. 20 after he was found guilty of robbing and killing a 19-year-old man in Ashrafieh in February 1996.

The AI statement, dated Dec. 30, urged the Jordanian government to stop executions from being carried out in the Kingdom and "work towards abolishing the death penalty by the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1998."

AI does not condone crimes of violence, the statement said, and recognises the responsibility of governments to bring criminals to justice.

However, it opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment, as specific in the UDHR, the statement continued.

Eleven people were executed in Jordan in 1997. In 1996, ten people were put to death for various crimes.

Begging, street vending becoming a common sight on Amman's streets

By Hind-Lara Mango
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — More and more Jordanian children, some of them school drop outs or victims of abuse by poor and unemployed families, have become professional street beggars and vendors.

"I have to beg to help my family of seven," said ten-year-old Ahmad Omar, standing near a traffic light in an affluent part of Amman. "If I return home with less than five dinars in my pockets, my father beats me and I sleep with no food," he said, wearing torn clothes and shivering in the cold.

Sharif, nine, and his brother spend their afternoons selling commodities at traffic lights. "My brother and I make JD50 a day selling toilet paper, tissue boxes, or whatever we are given to sell," said Sharif, who insisted that he only goes to the streets to sell after finishing his homework.

The rain-drenched boy said his parents, both of whom were healthy, stayed at home waiting for them.

"I mostly look for metal cans and styrofoam boxes, which I can sell for some money," said Ala Yousef, as his hands, with blackened shorn nails, searched through a trash bin outside the gates of a three-story villa.

A school drop-out, he sets off in the early hours to collect cans in a sack slung over his shoulders. He sells them to downtown merchants for 500

fils a kilogramme.

Once a rarity, scenes of children scavenging bins for anything edible, usable, or saleable, begging on the street, and selling small items at traffic lights in western areas of the capital, have become common.

To some officials and sociologists, the growing phenomenon of street beggars reflects increasing unemployment and poverty across Jordan.

Others say begging and street selling have become a good source for quick income. According to official figures, those struggling to provide daily bread now account for nearly 30 per cent of the 4.2 million population.

Most alarming, poverty — and its by-products of illiteracy and malnutrition — are on the rise.

"We can't actually call these children [beggars and street vendors] street children," said Minister of Social Development Mohammad Khair Mamsar.

They are categorised as cases of child abuse, since they are mostly forced to beg, clean cars, or sell items by their parents or mentors.

Dr. Mamsar said that compared to other countries, Jordan has no problem of "vagrancy and street children."

But he acknowledged in a recent interview with the Jordan Times that "begging has become organised" and is regarded as a profession. "It is very common for the

head of a seven-member family to put his children and wife in a pick-up and drop them in some parts of Amman in the early hours of the morning," Dr. Mamsar said.

"He then comes back in the evening to collect his family who, after a day of begging or selling chewing gum and other things, can give him between JD200 and 300."

Dr. Mamsar said the authorities last year picked up 800 children and adult vagrants and beggars.

Jordanian law does not consider begging by children under 18 years of age a crime.

Therefore, those between the age of three and 12 who are repeatedly rounded up by the ministry are put in an orphanage until their case is solved. If they are homeless, they are put in one of the 18 child care institutions and sent to school.

If they are between 12 and 18 years of age, they are put in a juvenile detention centre, where they receive vocational training. But often, they are bailed out within two days and return to the streets.

After rehabilitation, those who turn 18 are sent back to their families or helped by the ministry in finding jobs.

Dr. Mamsar said the ministry was working on amending regulations to hold parents responsible for abusing their children. It also wanted to come up with a programme to ensure that beggars and street children are well integrated into society once they come out.

He criticised cases of reported abuse by social workers, some of whom have been seen beating young beggars and shoving them into ministry vans after nabbing them.

"This is illegal. They should be rounded up peacefully," Dr. Mamsar said.

The government has said it supports over 59 per cent of the poor with monthly aid according to family size. Over 750 local and foreign charities are also trying to help.

The majority of the 520 children and adults rounded up in June and July in Greater Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid were boys between seven and 11 years old, Dr. Mamsar said.

"It was found that 118 of them were professional beggars. Most of them came from 'normal families,' that is, they were not poor," he said.

He said poverty ranked fifth on the list of reasons why they begged.

Orphans and children coming from broken homes were also found among street children.

He said the ministry was planning to set up two rehabilitation centres to offer street children a two to three-year vocational training programme.

Dr. Mamsar said the ministry planned to open 150 child centres offering educational and recreational facilities every day to help bring in street children and curb the phenomena, which peaks during the summer school break.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

EXHIBITIONS

* Display of Bani Hamida handicrafts (rugs, cushions, and wall hangings) at Bani Hamida House, Jabal Amman (Tel. 658696/7), until Jan. 5.

* "Modern Bulgarian Art" at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5537598), until Jan. 5.

* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5536098).

* Works by contemporary Arab artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh.

Indian Congress looks to past leaders to inspire future votes

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's once-dominant Congress party will use election posters featuring the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty rather than its current leaders to try to win votes in upcoming polls, reports said Wednesday.

The ailing Congress, hoping to return to power in the February-March elections, will also use posters of Sonia Gandhi, the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who has agreed to campaign for the party.

A Congress spokesman told AFP that he believed Sonia Gandhi's decision to campaign would lead the party to victory.

"The Congress is going to sweep the polls. There will be a clearcut majority. You cannot imagine how Sonia Gandhi's announcement has boosted the morale of the party," spokesman Ved Prakash said.

Wednesday's newspapers, quoting sources, said that the face of current party leader Sitaram Kesri would only be used in a limited number of constituencies.

"Our publicity committee will be meeting on the best way to project the party's leaders," Ved Prakash said, but denied Kesri would be largely ignored in the campaign publicity.

"Both Kesri and Sonia are immensely popular in the party," he said.

Congress posters have already appeared with Sonia Gandhi's photograph with the slogan "A new leader, a new direction."

The Congress has steadily lost support in recent years after ruling post-independence India under such leaders as Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

It was voted out of power in 1996 and overtaken as India's largest party by the

Hindu nationalists.

Since then it has been rocked by a string of corruption scandals and several internal splits, with high-profile leaders forming breakaway parties or joining the nationalists.

Meanwhile, a former state chief minister Wednesday announced he was leaving the Congress to join the Hindu nationalists.

The Hindu right-wingers, spurred by several other recent defections, predicted the Congress would suffer its worst electoral defeat in 1998.

A statement Wednesday said the Congress would face "disintegration after the election," adding that it had become synonymous with "irresponsible, unreliable and undemocratic behaviour."

Sonia Gandhi, who has no experience of active politics, Monday agreed to campaign for the Congress fol-

lowing a series of pleas from Kesri. She has turned down requests, however, to become a member of parliament.

The Congress is gambling that the Gandhi name will revitalise the party.

Analysts, however, say the Hindu nationalists are likely to attack Sonia Gandhi during the campaign for not being an Indian.

The 51-year-old Italian-born widow has remained in India since her husband's assassination in 1991 but has rarely been seen or given interviews, living in relative seclusion in a luxury house in the heart of New Delhi and restricting herself to charity fund-raising.

Despite Congress confidence in the drawing power of its former leaders, analysts say the polls are expected to lead to a hung parliament and another coalition government.



Mohammad Rafiq Tarar (left), ruling Pakistan Muslim League presidential candidate speaks with Mohammad Khan Sheerani (right), another presidential candidate in the national assembly (Reuters photo)

Pakistan PMs candidate sweeps presidential election

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Mohammad Rafiq Tarar, the nominee of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was elected president of Pakistan Wednesday by an overwhelming majority, election commission officials said.

Mr. Tarar secured 245 out of 298 votes polled by members of the federal parliament in Islamabad, chief

election commissioner Abdul Qadeer Chaudhry said.

There are 476 votes in the electoral college made up of the federal parliament and regional assemblies in Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province.

Mr. Tarar's main challenger Aftab Shabaan Mirani of the opposition

Pakistan People's Party of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, polled 39 votes.

Mr. Tarar, a 68-year old retired judge, was the candidate of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League. He is a family friend of the prime minister and will become the country's ninth president since independence from Britain 50 years ago.

IRA considered using poison darts to kill police in 1960s

DUBLIN (AFP) — Poisoned darts for use in a "quiet assassination campaign" against police in Northern Ireland were being considered by the Irish Republican Army in the 1960s, according to a previously secret police intelligence report published Thursday.

The top secret assessment of the IRA from the Irish Police Commissioner Patrick Carroll in 1966 is among state papers published for the first time by the National Archives Office.

It gives full details of the IRA's strategy and long-term planning and profiles the top 36 commanders at the time.

The report states there were about 1,000 members "who would obey military orders" — up from an estimated 650 in 1962 when a ceasefire was declared after a lengthy IRA campaign of violence along the border between the republic and

Northern Ireland.

The "military plan" was found in the possession of Sean Garland, a member of the seven-strong Army Council of the IRA, when he was arrested.

The blueprint for the IRA consisted of four stages: an anti-agent campaign to start immediately, large stunt-type operations, a phase of agricultural and industrial sabotage and the kidnapping of prominent members of the British government.

"Open" assassinations would be performed in riot situations in Northern Ireland and "informal" assassinations would also be "openly" assassinated.

There were to be quiet assassinations for police. "Silencers, poison darts can be used with effect," it said. "Spectacular kidnaps" would be used to secure hostages in the event of the execution of republicans. The IRA plan acknowledged that in Northern

Ireland the vast array of police and military and the hostility of the population meant that classic guerrilla-type operations could not be successful.

"We must learn from the Cypriots and engage in terror tactics only. The type of operation should be of an anti-personnel and sabotage nature."

The blueprint said the IRA must expect members to be tortured by police and therefore a basic unit should consist of only four men. "Anyone breaking under police interrogation could then only squeal on three men."

"A campaign of infiltrating trade unions to make them 'more revolutionary' was also planned. An IRA convention in 1963 split the whole island of Ireland into 18 'command areas' and a directive was issued that neither the public nor ordinary IRA men were to know about the restructuring.

Family doubts police explanation of Chinese dissident's death

BEIJING (AFP) — The family of Chinese dissident Yu Zhuo Wednesday said they were dissatisfied with the explanation Shenzhen police have provided for the 32-year-old's death, allegedly in a car accident on Dec. 19.

Family members told AFP they had demanded a "clarification" of the police account of the accident and its circumstances, adding that they found several aspects of the story questionable.

Mr. Yu, a student activist during the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy movement in Beijing, disappeared on Dec. 18, and the family only learned he was dead six days later after a friend made inquiries with police.

Shi Qianying, a policeman charged with surveillance of the dissident, told family members Mr. Yu had paged him and invited him to meet at a local cafe.

He said they both consumed large amounts of alcohol — some 20 bottles of an unspecified brew — until around 1 a.m., when Mr. Yu offered to drive him home.

According to Mr. Shi's account, he fell asleep in the car and was woken by the sound of it colliding with another vehicle. Mr. Yu had been thrown from the car when he came to, he said.

But no adequate explanation for why police failed to inform them of the accident for six days was given, family members said.

The policeman said he telephoned for an ambulance but was "disoriented" by the accident and thus forgot to contact the family after Mr. Yu died in hospital.

Family members also said it was unclear how — when the front of the vehicle's passenger side sustained the heaviest damage — the policeman escaped unhurt and Mr. Yu was thrown from the car and killed.

They questioned the likelihood of the drinking session described, saying the dissident drank very little, especially since purchasing his car.

Mr. Yu had been under constant police surveillance since being released from prison in 1994 after serving two years in jail. He had been convicted of putting up posters calling for a reevaluation of the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

In the wake of the crackdown, he was expelled from college and detained.

2,000 Cambodian refugees cross back from Thailand

ARANYAPRATHET.

Thailand (AFP) — Some 2,000 Cambodian refugees who fled their strife-torn country amid heavy factional fighting earlier this week Wednesday left Thailand for safe areas near the border, witnesses said.

The displaced civilians flooded over the border into the area surrounding this Thai border town Monday and Tuesday as troops loyal to strongman Hun Sen battled rival forces for control of a military base near the frontier.

The refugees crossed back into Cambodia to a safe area near the border after the fighting died down, a witness said.

Hun Sen's forces Tuesday regained control of a military outpost, O'Bai Cheun,

which they had lost the previous day to a rival faction. The 2,000 civilians scrambled across the Thai border as the fighting flared between the government troops and forces allied to ousted premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh close to the northwestern Cambodian border town of Poipet. Hun Sen's government troops were Wednesday firmly in control of the military base and were regrouping ahead of possible further fighting the witnesses said.

The rival resistance forces led by General Ly Virak were some six kilometers away. Shots were not being traded between the two sides despite the fierce battles of a day earlier, locals said.

Refugees caught up in the

fighting in the border area routinely cross over into Thailand to seek shelter, however Thailand has said it cannot give them long-term safe haven.

Meanwhile, in another border hotspot some 145 kilometers to the northeast of here, the opposing forces were gathering their forces after nearly two weeks of sporadic clashes for the town of O'Smach.

The town, perched on a hill on the Thai border, is the last stronghold of the prince's opposition forces.

The prince was toppled by Hun Sen in a weekend of bloody fighting in Phnom Penh in July and his men have been waging an increasingly guerrilla style war against Hun Sen since August.

New report surfaces on mystery Fiat in Diana crash

PARIS (AFP) — Four months to the day after the death of Diana, princess of Wales, a crucial new report emerged Wednesday on the presence of a mystery white Fiat Uno at the scene of the Aug. 31 crash.

The daily Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui said two witnesses had told police they saw a white Fiat Uno emerge from the Seine-side Alma tunnel at around the time Diana, her boyfriend Dodi Fayed and her chauffeur Henri Paul were killed in the crash.

The report surfaced as mourners continued to pile wreaths, messages and photos in memory of the dead princess on the Place de l'Alma near the tunnel.

The paper said the statement by the witnesses, an unnamed business executive and his wife, was contained in a 400-page report handed by police to investigating magistrate Hervé Stephan.

In an unprecedented inquiry on a road crash in France, two dozen officers were initially placed full-time on the case to piece together the exact circumstances of the 02:24 a.m. Sunday accident.

The mass circulation tabloid said the evidence of the witnesses, who asked to remain anonymous and were referred to as "François" and "Valérie", corroborated "the theory of a collision between a Fiat Uno vehicle and the Mercedes" in the Alma underpass.

Police found a broken rear light at the scene of the crash

and traces of paint on Diana's Mercedes which were shown to have come from a white Uno. But a massive effort to trace all similar cars in the Paris region has so far failed to turn up the vehicle.

Investigation sources told AFP that the statement by the two witnesses, said to have come forward on Sept. 18, was "one statement among many" but that it did credit the idea that somehow "a Fiat Uno was involved in the accident."

While efforts to find the mystery vehicle were continuing, the report on the crash maintained that the cause "was due to the chauffeur speeding and the fact that he was drunk at the time of the crash," the sources said.

The witnesses, who had dined in a restaurant nearby, said they saw the Fiat emerge from the underpass a few seconds after the crash, weaving from side to side. "The two witnesses said the driver was acting abnormally," the paper said, summing up their statement. "The Fiat was making a lot of noise. Its exhaust was backfiring. It was zig-zagging."

The driver "kept looking back and even pulled over suddenly in front of François into the right-hand lane as if he wanted to park. François had to brake and sound his horn, and then he passed the Fiat."

"He was puzzled and watched the car for a few seconds longer in his rear-view mirror, but it kept going."

The car was driven by a brown-haired Caucasian man in his forties, the paper said. There was a large dog in the rear of the car.

On Nov. 4, investigators began a vast inquiry into the whereabouts of the 40,000 owners of white Fiat Unos dating from between 1983 and 1987.

So far, more than 2,000 vehicles in the capital and the Paris area have been checked to no avail.

Two weeks ago, Stephan for the third time questioned the sole survivor of the crash, Trevor Rees-Jones, the 29-year British bodyguard to Fayed. He suffered serious head injuries and a loss of memory and has been unable to help investigators on what happened inside the tunnel.

In an interview this month, he told the Swiss daily Blick he remembered seeing the chauffeur drinking in the Ritz Hotel bar prior to the crash.

Paul, whose blood was tested several times in the course of the post-mortem, had a blood alcohol level three times the legal limit at the time of death.

After leaving the Ritz, the Mercedes, pursued by several paparazzi on motorcycles, entered a tunnel on a highway running alongside the Seine and crashed at high speed into a support pillar, killing Diana, Fayed and Paul.

Nine photographers and a rider are facing charges of manslaughter and of having failed to assist persons in danger.

Surgeons separate Siamese twins in South Africa

PRETORIA (AFP) — Surgeons have successfully separated Siamese twins joined at the top of the head after a marathon operation at a hospital here Wednesday, a doctor who took part in the surgery told AFP.

Doctors separated 11-month-old Luka and Joseph Banda at around 6:30 a.m. (0430 GMT) after an operation lasting more than 24 hours, Professor Samuel Mokgokong said.

A team of plastic surgeons then took over, completing the operation to close the boys' skins shortly after 10:30 a.m.

"So far it is fair to say that things look quite stable," Mr. Mokgokong said.

The baby boys are from Zambia. The team of American, South African and Zambian neurosurgeons, led by American Ben Carson from Johns Hopkins University

in Baltimore, had begun their bid to separate the boys at 6:30 a.m. Tuesday.

But in the early hours of Wednesday morning, the Ga-Rankuwa Hospital announced that the intricate surgery had "hit some difficulties" in trying to separate the twins' shared blood vessels.

"At about midnight we encountered such difficulties that we thought the operation was going to kill the boys," Prof. Mokgokong explained.

"We had to come out of the theatre and have a conference for about 30 minutes but we decided to continue, very slowly, very meticulously," he told AFP.

He said the operation "became very exhausting and difficult."

"It would have been very disappointing to give up when we had already removed the bone that held the heads together."

The boys were expected to be put on a ventilator in the hospital's intensive care unit. "They will be ventilated for at least 24 hours," said Prof. Mokgokong.

The operation was undertaken in South Africa at the request of the Lusaka government, since Zambia does not have the necessary facilities.

The twins have been at the Ga-Rankuwa Hospital since October, accompanied by Zambian doctors and their 32-year-old mother, Joyce.

"I'm feeling bad. In the long time that I am here it was okay, but today was particularly stressful," she said in comments carried in the Johannesburg Star newspaper Wednesday.

"Because of the abnormality of the twins, I had no choice but to accept that the operation had to take place. My children have the right to a normal life," she said.

German shoppers alerted to poisoned jam

HAMM, Germany (AFP) — German police warned Wednesday that another pot of poisoned Schwartzau-brand jam had been found by a supermarket shopper, two weeks after the company said it was the victim of blackmail.

The latest pot was found in a supermarket in the town of Hamm, in western Germany, by a shopper who spotted that the lid was not properly sealed.

Inside the lid was the label: "Warning! Poison."

The pot was immediately sent for testing, but turned out to be a copycat contamination based on blackmail incidents reported by Schwartzau two weeks ago, said the police.

Three pots of Schwartzau with the same type of warning were found in separate shops in the north of the country on Dec. 17.

19. Tests revealed the jams contained a substance used in rat poison.

The jam-makers said they had recently received threats that their product would be poisoned unless they handed over large sums of money.

Blackmail of food manufacturers is not an unusual occurrence in Germany. Condiment-makers Thomy and Maggi were both victims of extortion in April 1997.

Chechen journalists freed in south Russia region

MAKHACHKALA, Russia (R) — Seven journalists from the rebel Republic of Chechnya who were seized last week in the southern Russian region of Dagestan were released Wednesday.

"We were freed at 5 a.m. this morning with the help of local interior ministry officials," Reuters journalist Alkha Tosuyev said by telephone from the regional capital Makhachkala.

"We are all well, everything is okay," he added. Tosuyev said he and the other six, including Reuters cameraman Ayub Vedzhezhev, planned to return to Chechnya later Wednesday. They would give more details then.

The Chechen residents working for Reuters, Worldwide Television News (WTN), Associated Press and two major Russian television networks — ORT and NTV — were reported missing on Dec. 25 after crossing into Dagestan to report on the aftermath of an attack on a Russian tank unit there.

A group calling itself the People's Militia of Dagestan had said it was holding them and wanted ethnic Dagestanis being held hostage in neighbouring Chechnya to be freed in exchange for their release.

Dagestani officials had said Tuesday they expected the journalists to be freed soon. ITAR-TASS news agency quoted the Dagestani interior ministry as saying their release had been unconditional.

Russia's ORT state television station reported from Dagestan that the seven men were found, unguarded, in the cellar of an unfinished house. Some of them were in handcuffs.

Tosuyev said the journalists had been kidnapped on Dec. 22 by half a dozen men who did not identify themselves. He said the journalists had been manhandled but not beaten up.

An unidentified armed group attacked the Russian tank unit in the Dagestani town of Buinaksk, destroying several tanks and other vehicles and wounding two servicemen on Dec. 22.

The group was reported to have fled to Chechnya after the attacks, seizing hostages and killing a policeman on the way.

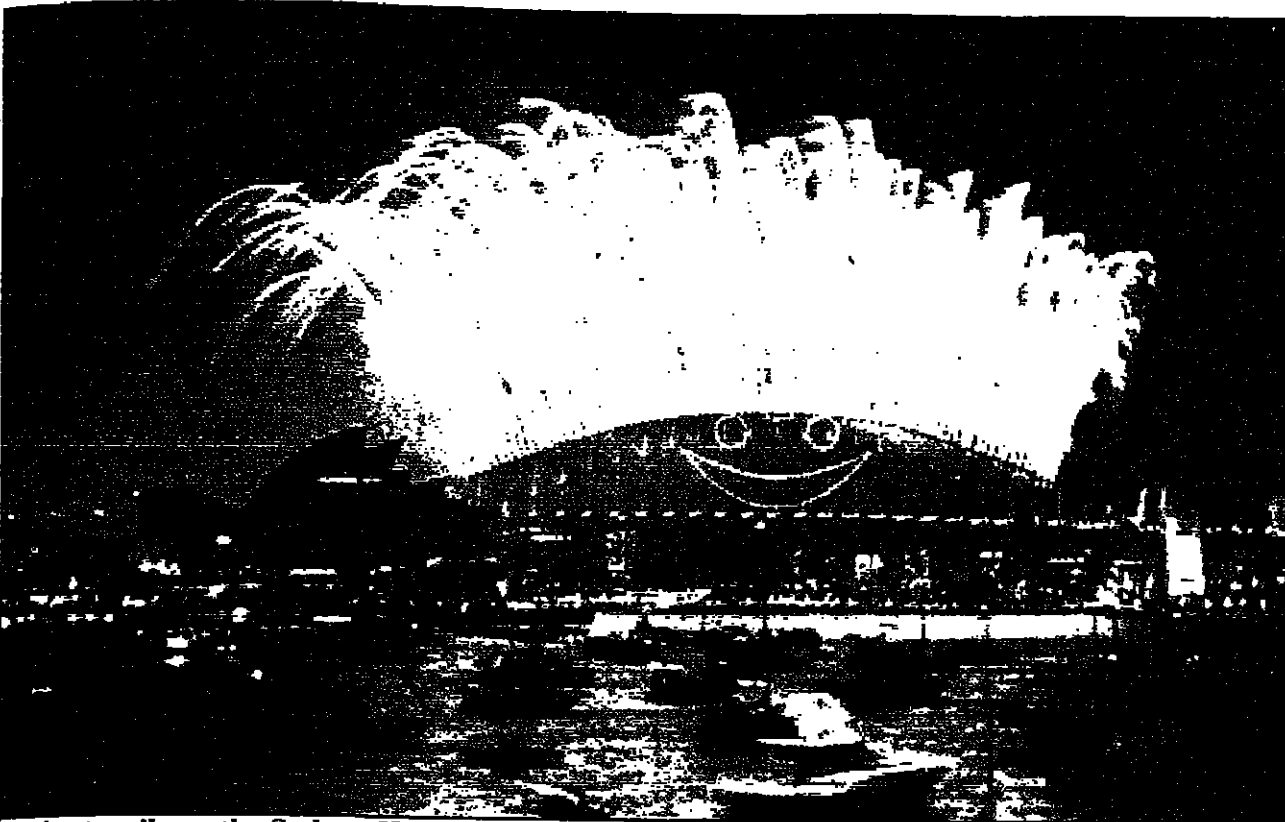
Chechen leaders, who have declared their mainly Muslim region independent and fought a 21-month war against Russian troops, have denied involvement in the attack.

Moscow considers Chechnya to be part of the vast Russian Federation, just like Dagestan.

Gas bottle explosion kills 5 in Russia

MOSCOW (AFP) — Five people were killed in northwestern Russia after a man caused a gas bottle to explode in a bid to commit suicide after a row with his wife, the Russian press agency ITAR-TASS reported Wednesday.

Quoting a spokesman from the Russian Ministry of Emergencies, ITAR-TASS said the incident arose after a domestic quarrel between the couple Tuesday in a workshop in the Leningrad region. The man punched his wife then tried to commit suicide. He opened the gas bottle and lit a flame near the emission, causing the bottle to explode, killing himself, his wife and three workers in the vicinity.



A giant smile on the Sydney Harbour Bridge can be seen as fireworks shoot from the top as part of celebrations to mark the New Year. More than 20,000 fireworks at a cost of Australian dollars 2 million (\$1.3 million) made up the display, with an estimated crowd of 500,000 watching from boats or the foreshores of the harbour (Reuter photo)

Italian bank hostage taker jailed

MILAN (AFP) — Domenico Gargano, the 35-year-old Sicilian who held staff hostage at a Milan bank while demanding millions of dollars in ransom, was jailed early Wednesday, police sources said.

Police commandos stormed the bank Tuesday night, over 24 hours after the drama began at the small Milanese branch of the Banca Popolare.

Mr. Gargano, who was reported to have been high on cocaine, released the last of his four hostages about at 4:30 p.m. (15H30 GMT).

Milan Governor Marcello

China bans sale of blood products

BEIJING (AFP) — China is to ban the sale of blood products in a bid to crack down on illegal trafficking of tainted blood, the Xinhua news agency said Wednesday.

The move is part of a new law announced Tuesday by President Jiang Zemin which aims to "guarantee the safe use of blood," it said.

Under the new law, only blood given by volunteers can be used for medical needs.

Anyone who sells blood given by volunteers, or who traffics in blood products will face maximum fines of 100,000 yuan (\$12,000), and once the full law comes into effect in October, they will also face criminal prosecution, Xinhua said.

Some Chinese hospitals currently pay donors who are generally from the poorest classes.

Authorities are also concerned over trafficking groups who collect blood from donors in often unsanitary conditions and sell it, raising concerns about the spread of diseases including Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

During a debate on the law in the National People's Congress, lawmaker Yang Jingsheng said "harsh punishment should be levied on those who profit from organising others to sell blood."

Health ministry figures show only 8,277 cases of acquired AIDS nationwide although authorities concede the real figure could be anywhere between 150,000 and 200,000.

China set up a national blood donation system in 1978 but it has been unable to keep up with demand with many hospitals lacking facilities to preserve blood products.

The new law also calls on "healthy citizens aged between 18 and 55 to donate blood voluntarily, and encourages personnel of organs of the state, soldiers on active service, and students in colleges and universities to take the lead in doing so."

Sci-fi author Clarke welcomes honour, may not travel to receive it

COLOMBO (AFP) — British-born science fiction guru Arthur C. Clarke, who has made Sri Lanka his home, said he was glad to have received a knighthood but was unlikely to receive it personally.

The 80-year-old space age visionary, included in Britain's New Year Honours List published Wednesday, said he was handicapped by post-polio syndrome and may not be able to travel to accept the honour from Queen Elizabeth.

"I am very glad to have got this," Mr. Clarke told AFP. "All my phones are flashing with people calling me from all over the world. I am really tied up this morning."

However, he posed for a photographer at his residence in Colombo's fashionable Barnes Place and insisted that he be photographed standing in front of his book rack to stress that he was not always confined to a wheelchair.

He said the cold weather in Britain may not agree with him and that will weigh against travelling to London.

However, he said he would be pleased to meet Prince Charles who is due to visit Sri Lanka as chief guest at celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of independence from Britain.

The British High Commissioner (Ambassador) David Tatham said he was delighted by the award of a knighthood to Mr. Clarke for services to literature. Mr. Clarke was appointed a Commander of the British

Empire (CBE) in 1989.

"I am sure that the British community in Sri Lanka, and Sir Arthur's many Sri Lankan friends, will join with me in offering their warmest congratulations to him on this very well deserved honour," Tatham said.

Mr. Clarke was born in Minehead, England in 1917 but since the mid 1950s he has lived in Sri Lanka which has honoured its "resident guest" by naming a science institute after him and making him vice chancellor of a university.

He prophesied the establishment of geostationary satellites and published his theory of communication satellites in 1945 and has since been regarded as a space age visionary.

He is one of the best known sci-fi authors with more than 80 books to his credit. He co-wrote the screenplay of Stanley Kubrick's movie "2001: A Space Odyssey."

In his latest book "3001: The Final Odyssey," released in March, Mr. Clarke offered an optimistic view of mankind's future, including the colonisation of Venus, the abolition of religion and the construction of cities atop towers that extend into space.

He said he is not a prophet but expects the petroleum industry to be doomed as more efficient sources of energy will be discovered while personal computers will become smaller, more powerful and user friendly.

Mr. Clarke was fascinated by the close-up pictures of

the surface of Mars and described the view from the Pathfinder mission sent back to Earth in July as spectacular.

"I am very excited. It is a mission carried out well. I have written many books on this, on how we could colonise Mars," he said shortly after video taping the Pathfinder footage.

"My hope is that there may be life there," Mr. Clarke said. "Life is very tenacious and once it starts it will hang on. I believe it is hanging on somewhere on Mars."

"I will be very disappointed if they don't find at least fossils of some life form," he said. "I will be very surprised if they don't find some life on Mars."

Mr. Clarke said the surveying of the Mars surface in the next two years will be even more exciting for scientists because it will give a better view of the entire planet.

About his own work, he said "3001" will "definitely" be his final book, rounding off the quartet which began with "2001." Mr. Clarke visited the 133-year-old Galle Face Hotel hours before the official launch of "3001" and presented a copy of the book to the hotel's Chairman Sanjeev Gardiner who sheltered him while writing the final chapters.

Mr. Clarke recently unveiled a bronze statue of himself at the Galle Face Hotel and was delighted with what he found. "This is a remarkable resemblance. This is unbelievable. I don't know how they did it. This is my clone."

was hammered into place.

Unearthing this ancient feat of dentistry were Pascal Murail from the anthropological research laboratory at Talence, Eric Crubezy of the Anthropological Federation at Toulouse University and Jean-Pierre Bernadou from France's prestigious Aeronautical and Space College.

The journal said the discovery proves that osseointegration — the merging of an implant with the bone — could be achieved with "surprisingly basic technology."

The man certainly had no anaesthetic to fix his implant, which the anthropologists believe

Kenya's controversial polls suggest Moi may face run-off

NAIROBI (AFP) — First results from Kenya's stormy and controversial polls suggested Wednesday that President Daniel Arap Moi may face a run-off round against opposition contender Mwai Kibaki.

Observers cautioned, however, against reaching any conclusion about the outcome on the strength of the very small number of figures given so far.

At around noon (0900 GMT), results from a handful of the east African country's 210 constituencies showed that Mr. Moi, in power since 1978 and seeking a final term, was running ahead of former Vice-President Kibaki.

The electoral commission, which was accused of rigging the polls as voting ran into an unscheduled second day Tuesday, stated that turnout in just 18 constituencies where votes had been counted was between 65 and 89 per cent.

Mr. Kibaki was reelected in his central Othaya stronghold with more than 90 per cent of the votes, while outsider woman candidate Charity Ngilu was left trailing well behind on

initial reported figures.

The electoral commission's chief, Samuel Kivuitu, said Wednesday that most Kenyans had voted and that there was no reason to annul the process, in spite of major logistical problems.

Mr. Kivuitu stressed, however, that the commission could not announce results of the elections until the counting was complete at all polling stations, which had closed. Final results were not expected for several days.

In a statement issued by the presidential press service Tuesday, Mr. Moi said he was "extremely unhappy with the Electoral Commission because of its obvious scheme to rig the ongoing elections in favour of the opposition."

But Mr. Kivuitu riposted that "the commission would welcome any evidence of malpractice." He admitted that "the elections were difficult," but said he had done nothing wrong and asked his critics: "Why should I resign?"

At least nine people have been killed since Monday, including two shot by

police at Nakuru in the Rift Valley Tuesday. No incidents were reported Wednesday, but police were out in force around counting centres.

The autocratic Mr. 73, is running for a final five-year term against 12 challengers, while 883 candidates are contesting the 210 seats in parliament on behalf of 23 parties.

The chaotic organisation of the polls, with some stations failing to function properly for lack of staff and materials and charges of fraud flying thick and fast, led to fears Tuesday of an outbreak of serious violence.

At least two opposition parties contending against Mr. Moi's long-dominant Kenya African National Union (KANU) have already formally called for the voiding of the polls, held simultaneously for the head of state, parliament and local government.

Ms. Ngilu's Social Democratic Party (SDP) has stated that it would like to see new elections held in six months' time, while Raila Odinga, another presidential hopeful,

demanding the resignation of the head of state and the establishment of a national unity government for six months.

While observers said that no great significance could be derived from the results from 18 constituencies in presidential elections and 13 in general elections, state radio and television nevertheless put Mr. Moi in first place and said he was said to be neck and neck with Mr. Kibaki in 10 constituencies in Rift Valley, coastal and central regions.

Among members of parliament declared elected were seven KANU candidates, on top of 13 other KANU MPs who had not faced any opposition.

Mr. Moi was initially tipped by many to win the elections outright in part because of divisions among his opponents.

Poll commission Chairman Kivuitu for his part blamed problems on conditions beyond his control, including the weather and alleged poor work by British company Smith and Ozman Ltd. responsible for printing and treating ballot papers.

More than 1 m chickens slain in Hong Kong amid bird flu fears

HONG KONG (AFP) — The slaughter of over a million chickens was nearing completion here Wednesday as China denied that the deadly bird flu which triggered the cull had originated across the border.

More than one million of the estimated 1.3 million chickens and other poultry in the territory have been destroyed in a dramatic bid to wipe out the virus which had previously been found only in birds but has claimed four lives here in recent months.

Hong Kong's Agriculture and Fisheries Department hoped the slaughter could be completed Wednesday, but said the 1,000 workers drafted in especially to perform the gruesome task may have trouble reaching the most remote farms.

Chinese officials, while admitting that no blood tests for the flu had been carried out on humans on the mainland, denied that the deadly virus came from China.

"Human blood samples have not as yet been tested for the virus," the official Xinhua news agency quoted experts as saying.

"Surveillance work targeting the virus will be intensified across the country. However, there is no need to panic about the possibility of an epidemic," it added.

Hong Kong has suspended poultry imports from mainland China.

The Chinese authorities have reportedly also suspended the export of other live and frozen poultry, including ducks, geese and pigeons.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Hong Kong health department said there had been no new cases of the H5N1 virus identified in the past four days.

Four people affected by the virus have died since May, with six people remaining in hospital, including three young women in critical condition.

The Hong Kong government has said it would draw up contingency plans if the 19 confirmed and suspected cases developed into an epidemic.

Paul So, the Health Department deputy director, told legislators

Wednesday that an emergency plan was in place but that no vaccine was yet available.

He said the department would decide next month whether to produce a vaccine which could take six months to prepare.

Mr. So said there was a possibility of human-to-human infection, but that World Health Organisation experts had assured that the possibility was low.

Legislators accused the government of losing the battle to contain the virus, causing widespread public fear here and abroad.

Thailand has put Bangkok airport on the alert for flu cases.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-Wah inspected the territory's largest wholesale poultry market, which was closed after chickens were found dead from the virus last weekend.

"This is an issue that concerns the welfare of all the six million people in Hong Kong and it is an issue that all of us in the government are very concerned about," he said.

Mr. Tung was confronted by a group of poultry traders asking for compensation following the slaughter.

Hong Kong could be without chickens for the Lunar New Year holiday in late January.

Chicken is the main dish at Chinese banquets and is frequently used as a religious offering.

Buddhists have carried out religious rites to appease the souls of the dead chickens, fearing the slaughter could bring a calamity to Hong Kong particularly in the coming year of the tiger.

At one ceremony Tuesday, more than 600 kilograms of live fish were released into the sea. Buddhists said they believed this would make it easier for animals and humans to be reincarnated.

"We believe the freeing of life will help others," Reverend Sik Wing Sing said.

Leung Him-tai, a follower, added: "In the wake of the chicken slaughter, it will also help the chickens die more comfortably."

Zambia's Kaunda will be freed from jail — Chiluba

LUSAKA (AFP) — Jailed Zambian ex-leader Kenneth Kaunda, held under emergency powers over a foiled coup plot, will be freed from prison Wednesday and placed under house arrest, President Frederick Chiluba announced.

Mr. Chiluba said he would sign an order later Wednesday to release Mr. Kaunda, 73, after he had received "reasonable requests" from Tanzanian envoy Julius Nyerere and President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.

"I hereby order that from Dec. 31, 1997, Dr. Kenneth David Kaunda be restricted to plot number 10970/10969, commonly known as Kalundu House in the Lusaka province, and remain there for the duration of this order," Mr. Chiluba told a news conference.

The decision to free Mr. Kaunda from a notorious high security prison he has been held in since Christmas Day was reached following an emergency cabinet meeting Tuesday night, prompted by direct appeals from retired Tanzanian leader Nyerere and Mr. Mugabe, who is current chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

"I received very reasonable requests from elder statesman Nyerere, another appeal from President Mugabe... I listened to my elder statesmen," Mr. Chiluba said.

The two African leaders reportedly said they could not interfere with the process of law in Zambia and in the affairs of the nation, but suggested that as a founding father of the country, Mr. Kaunda be put under house arrest.

After such persuasion from Mr. Mugabe and Mr. Nyerere, Mr. Chiluba said he would get Mr. Kaunda moved to his Kalundu house in Lusaka, but explained that there would be certain restrictions.

"He will be restricted to his own home, but there are conditions in the restriction and I hope he (Kaunda) cooperates because if he doesn't, we may be compelled to take him back where he thinks he must stay," Mr. Chiluba said.

One of these conditions was that Mr. Kaunda, who remains a leading opposition politician, must not

participate in active politics until his case, which is currently being handled by the courts, is over. Mr. Chiluba attacked, without naming, other countries in the region and abroad which have sought to put pressure on him through media statements, saying they were simply embarking on an "academic exercise".

"We don't pay attention, we don't listen to those," he said.

South Africa was one of the first countries to call for Mr. Kaunda's release followed by the United States. Several others followed suit.

Mr. Kaunda was arrested three days after he returned from two months abroad. He was alleged to have been involved in an Oct. 28 coup attempt staged by junior army officers.

His detention was the latest in wave of arrests in the aftermath of the coup bid that saw 91 people, including prominent opposition politician Dean Mungomba, detained.

Mr. Kaunda has been kept in a maximum security prison in a central mining town, under a 28-day police detention order.

Mr. Chiluba also specified that no people would be allowed within 100 metres of Mr. Kaunda's home in the capital, but said police, who will man the property, would vet and determine access to him by family members.

Another condition would be that Mr. Kaunda should not give any press interviews.

Mr. Chiluba, who took over from Mr. Kaunda in the country's first democratic polls in 1991, denied that the arrest of his predecessor had anything to do with settling old scores or political rivalry.

He also said the prosecution was not setting a precedent to arrest political leaders in the country.

"We have not set any precedents to arrest presidents. We look at the crime, not the person," Mr. Chiluba said, in a reference to the former president of neighbouring Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, who is facing prosecution for sodomy.

Before making the announcement, Mr. Chiluba met African diplomats for a briefing.

1900-year-old dental implant unearthed in France

LONDON (AFP) — A metal tooth implanted in a jaw of a man from the first century A.D. has been found at a burial site in Essonne, south of the French capital, the British journal Nature reported.

The tooth, found at a necropolis at Chantambre, in the rural area around Milly-la-Forêt in Essonne, is the first example of a functional

dental implant from Gallo-Roman times, the journal said.

The wrought iron tooth was found carefully attached to the jaw of a man in his thirties, who lived at either the end of the first or the start of the second century A.D., and was used to replace an upper premolar.

French anthropologists who uncovered the tooth

note that the man probably had the implant a year before he died.

The journal said the discovery proves that osseointegration — the merging of an implant with the bone — could be achieved with "surprisingly basic technology."

The man certainly had no anaesthetic to fix his implant, which the anthropologists believe

was hammered into place.

Unearthing this ancient feat of dentistry were Pascal Murail from the anthropological research laboratory at Talence, Eric Crubezy of the Anthropological Federation at Toulouse University and Jean-Pierre Bernadou from France's prestigious Aeronautical and Space College.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation Established 1975
 جوردن تايمز مؤسسة صحفية مستقلة تصدر باللغة الإنجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية

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 Jordan Press Foundation,
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 Telex: 21497 Al Rai JO
 Facsimile: 696183

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times advertising department.

For a new beginning

JOHN DEUTSCH, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), recently added his voice to those protesting against the U.S. policy of "dual containment" towards Iraq and Iran. While attributing the failure of this policy to, inter alia, the lack of support for it by major U.S. allies including France, Japan and Russia, Deutsch saw the main shortcoming of the policy as its inability to separate the issue of Iraq from that of Iran.

HRH Crown Prince Hassan has been a constant critic of America's "dual containment" doctrine. Last month, right after the Islamic summit in Tehran, the Crown Prince called for a fresh start in dealing with Iran in the wake of the election of moderate Mohammad Khatami as president. If there is going to be a change of heart in Washington on Iran, however, we trust it will not be at the expense of the Iraqi people and the unity of Iraq. If the purpose of the assessment of the U.S. position on Iran is solely to direct a new policy of unilateral containment of Iraq as a sovereign and independent country, the whole exercise will be self-defeating.

Iraq and its people must not be targeted as a permanent threat to regional peace. Iraq's full potential as a contributor to regional peace and security must not be dismissed or brushed aside. Rather it should be cultivated as is the case with Iran. The international community should strive to make the Middle East free from all weapons of mass destruction and fight to remove causes for instability in the region including the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab territories.

At a time when a U.S. congressman, Tom Lantos, is considering visiting Tehran to explore new channels for a fresh dialogue with the newly-elected Iranian president, the stage could be set for a new American approach on the Middle East generally. Such a change — based on respect for international legitimacy, human rights and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of the region — could be the very foundation for a new, stable and prosperous Middle East.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Aswaq's Ahmad Dabbas Wednesday said a threat by fuel distributors and gas stations to stop supplying the public with fuel as of Thursday will result in serious consequences if the government does not move swiftly to deal with the issue. The gas stations and distributors of fuel and oil products have chosen the perfect moment for pressuring the government to respond to their demands for a higher margin of commission on the sale of fuel as their intended strike comes at the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan and when the actual cold season has set in, said the writer. If the strikers proceed with their threat, Jordanians will face a real and immediate problem. Dabbas said. He said the distributors may have legitimate demands in seeking to secure increased commissions, and the government should open an immediate dialogue with their association to reach a compromise and avert a crisis.

Al Doustour's Jihad Momani said the Jordanian embassy and staff in Israel have been exposed for the second time to attacks, but no one heard from the official information services in Jordan about them nor whether the government plans to take steps to prevent further acts of this nature. It is dismaying to hear these reports from the Israeli media and more dismaying to see the Jordanian government failing to take action or at least inform the public about such incidents, said the writer. The government raised the hue and cry over the Iraqi government's execution of Jordanians in Iraq for being involved in criminal activity but it is keeping silent over Israel's unjustified attacks on Jordanian diplomatic staff in Tel Aviv. Referring to this year's reported attack on an Israeli embassy car in Amman, the writer said frenzied activity followed, with the car occupants receiving treatment at the King Hussein Medical Centre and Jordan condemning the attack although it turned out later that it was the Israeli secret service which opened fire on the embassy car. The writer said the difference between Jordan and Israel is that in Israel the government dedicates its time and effort towards serving the Israeli people.

View from Academia

Ramadan and the rhythm of life

By Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

LAST RAMADAN I wrote about some of the negative practices which prevail in the holy month on the part of those Muslims who either fail to understand and appreciate the true meaning of fasting or fail to live up to the challenge. Such individuals abuse Ramadan through the unhealthy attitudes, habits and practices which they adopt. Rather than be diligent, courteous, civil, cheerful, patient and charitable (values which define the true spirit of Ramadan), you find them lazy, grumpy, obnoxious, impatient, reckless and selfish. You find such undesirable (un-Ramadan, un-Islamic) behaviour in the home and work environments as well as on public roads: in the grumpy, selfish father; the grumpy, selfish civil servant; and the grumpy, selfish motorist.

This year, I wish to address one positive aspect of Ramadan: its overall impact on the rhythm of life.

Some of us are undeniably good at planning our daily life in a way which kills the monotony and routine of it. You find a wife and a husband or a friend and another friend (of the minority who belong to this category) putting their heads together to come up with suggestions which make their life a little more interesting than it generally is — without planning, that is. You find them, through some planning or through spontaneous ventures, taking the time to do something a little different: a lunch or brunch out, a cup of coffee, a movie, an outing, a trip to a historical site, a trip abroad, an activity (social, intellectual, athletic), etc. Certainly the noticeable change in the environment of the capital Amman and the Kingdom at large helps in this respect: the country does have much to offer, for those who care to find out what is happening.

Most people in our society, however, lead monotonous, routine lives. A comfortable majority of us do not dine out, do not go on outings, do not visit historical sites (it would be interesting to conduct a study on how many Jordanians have visited Wadi Rum or even Petra), do not take part in intellectual or cultural activities, do not travel, do not pursue a hobby seriously, do not engage in sports activities, do not socialise in an organised way — do not do much really, beyond what they "normally" do. Many spend their time, after their working hours (8:00-2:00), either drinking tea or coffee and chatting and gossiping or working at all kinds of odd jobs to make ends meet. Everybody — including the ones who spend their time drinking tea and coffee — are "too busy" to go out, get together, make a trip to Jerash, play volleyball, go to a musical concert, etc. For 10 years, I have been trying to play tennis on a regular basis, and I have failed. My friends who know how to play tennis are always "busy."

We, in this culture, have a big problem organising and coordinating things. I was talking with a colleague the other day who had just come from abroad. "Why is it almost impossible for us to do what others take for granted?" he asked. You cannot organise the smallest of things here, without people apologising for not being able to attend or participate. "The weekends are wasted, the holidays are wasted, the free time is wasted." There is a great deal of truth in what my friend said. Most people (perhaps more in our culture than in others) have succumbed to a boring, killing routine. They find it difficult to take the initiative and difficult to follow it through once they take it — and they find it difficult to respond to the initiatives

of others.

Ramadan is a great blessing in this respect. It comes once a year to shake people up a little, to inject some vigour and vitality into their lives, and disrupt the boring, killing routine. This happens at all levels: Ramadan changes eating habits (and the type of food they eat), sleeping habits, work habits, prayer habits, social habits. People (the family members themselves, their relatives and their friends) get together more often than usual, socialise in a more organised fashion, invite each other more. There is a great deal of enthusiasm about the various daily chores and activities. Those who can afford it go out at night to one of the many interesting Ramadan activities: those who can't have other options (the mosque, the homes of relatives and friends, etc.). There is something in it for everyone: for those who have and those who have not.

Ramadan is a special month indeed. In addition to its religious and spiritual significance, it does a lot for us at the level I have been describing: it helps people transcend the normal, routine, prosaic life they live. It injects some romance and poetry into the lives of everyone. The anticipation, the thrill, and the joy that come as a result of fasting are tremendous. This alone (among other things, of course) is a great benefit and advantage, especially in a culture like ours which takes so much for granted and is almost deterministically controlled by the "circumstances" or "conditions" of life.

Thaw in Iran-U.S. ties could hinge on aircraft, oil

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — Most Americans are not sitting on pins and needles awaiting the New Year message promised by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami during the just concluded Islamic summit in Tehran in the first sign of a thaw in U.S. Iranian relations. However, some Americans, the foot soldiers in the State Department and the National Security Council as well as others in lesser known foreign policy agencies and think tanks here, are wondering what this "Ayatollah Gorbachev" as he has been called after his "landslide" election last May, might have up his sleeve.

The hurdles are too high for one clean sweep, and some detractors are already dismissing the unprecedented gesture as "a clever re-packaging of existing policies." Patrick Clawson, who was until recently associated with the National Defence University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, opined that judging from Khatami's recent speeches he may turn out to be only an "Ayatollah Brezhnev" with whom it would be possible to combine some measure of détente along with continued containment. Others are more categorical, doubting there can be any quick turnaround in Iran's foreign policy as long as the country's final arbiter on foreign policy matters remains Ali Khamenei, the hardline supreme leader.

Besides foreign policy, Khamenei retains control over the interior and intelligence ministries, and the armed forces — all hard nuts to crack. The issues that divide the two nations, at loggerheads for over 18 years since the infamous ransacking of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the celebrated hostage crisis that lasted 444 days, are serious and fundamental. The Islamic regime is accused by the United States of attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction, sponsoring terrorism, and undermining the Middle East peace process.

Iran wants the U.S. to release all frozen Iranian assets and rejects the unilateral imposition by the U.S. Congress of sanctions on any country whose companies invest more than \$20 million a year in Iran's oil and gas industry.

London, told the New York Journal of Commerce this week, that he had met with Boeing officials at the Dubai air show last month. The two sides reportedly discussed Iran Air's desire to replace about 20 aircraft in the next two or three years. When the

In all the utterances made by Khatami or his close aides, there has been no marked deviation in the opinion of U.S. analysts from traditional Iranian positions.

In all the utterances made by Khatami or his close aides, there has been no marked deviation in the opinion of U.S. analysts from traditional Iranian positions. While at one point he advocated "a dialogue with the American people" — not government — Khatami declared: "We have opposed the peace process and we still do. (Israel) is a racist, terrorist and expansionist regime," adding his hope that "the roots of the problem in the region and the world will be destroyed." This may have not sounded much different from the views as expressed by Khamenei at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit when he declared "Western materialistic civilisation (for) directing everyone towards materialism while money, gluttony, and carnal desires are made the greatest aspirations."

But the promise of Caspian oil and the dangling of a multimillion dollar deal by Iran Air which is eager to replace its aging fleet of Boeings in a few years may help alter the perspectives of officials in the two countries, or so hope some Iran watchers here, irrespective of the anticipated clash between hardliners and moderates within Iran's ruling circles over a rapprochement with Washington.

The recently appointed chairman and managing director of Iran Air, Ahmad Reza Kazemi, a former diplomat who served in

Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz came to Washington earlier this month he, too, had with him an order for 49 Boeing aircraft — a \$2.5 billion deal that must have pleased American officials despite Turkey's human rights record. Even Israel's airline El Al is buying five 737 jets from Boeing for \$180 million, a transaction that has drawn barbed comments from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a news service. It said in reporting the deal this week: "By choosing Boeing, Israel avoided a confrontation with the (Clinton) administration at a time of strained relations between Tel Aviv and Washington. It also revived the question of whether Israel is obligated to buy American because of the U.S. foreign aid it receives."

The oil picture is more complicated. Oil projects in Iran are subjected to the 1996 Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which imposes sanctions on any company investing more than \$20 million in either country. Hopes were raised, however, among oil industry analysts in the United States after Khatami's call for "a civilisational dialogue" with the West. To date, the Clinton administration has aggressively pursued a policy of pressuring the Central Asian republics and the oil industry to shun Iranian territory in planning pipeline routes from the Caspian

Sea. These analysts favour a quick reversal of U.S. policy or else they warn that costly pipelines are being developed that follow the anti-Iran policy line. "That would be the worst possible scenario, to have your line just completed just as Iran becomes available," Robert Ebel, director of the energy and national security programme at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said in an interview. In 10 months, the Azerbaijan International Operating Company, an offshore oil consortium, is due to decide on a main export pipeline route for its \$7.4 billion project there. On the other hand, the Clinton administration favours a line running through Georgia to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan — the costliest of three options, about \$3.5 billion. The least costly is a pipeline passing through Iran to the Gulf which can be built for only \$1.5 billion.

Meanwhile, Iran, Turkey and Turkmenistan announced this week that the Anglo Dutch oil giant, Royal Dutch/Shell, will be conducting a feasibility study for the construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey via Iran. This announcement preceded the opening on Dec. 29 of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to northeastern Iran, thus allowing the ex-Soviet state to export its gas bypassing Russia.

"If there is any hint of a change (in U.S. policy) it is magnificently concealed," said Richard Murphy, a former assistant secretary of state for the Near East, and senior fellow at the New York Council on Foreign Relations. He added in a newspaper interview: "It's going to be slow, and next year is an election year. Who needs wimps in the White House when you can face down the Iranians?" But, he added, "The opportunity is fascinating."

The writer is a retired USIS senior editor who now lives in Washington. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

Iran's women: An impatient force

By Philip Taubman

TEHRAN — Each morning as the sun slides above the horizon, a small group of daring women gathers on a hilltop in Mellat Park, a tidy green oasis in northern Tehran. They come to exercise in a public spot. As the women beat their arms and their dark coats billow in the morning chill, they look like a flock of ravens about to take flight.

It is another small victory for the women of Iran. Until recently women were barred from working out in public, in deference to the Islamic requirements of modesty.

Though Iran is by no means the most restrictive society for women in the Muslim World, the limitations seem especially oppressive because they were imposed less than two decades ago and are enforced as much to discourage individuality as to maintain religious faith.

They are part of a system of ideological and political control used by the ruling clerics to keep order and limit liberty.

But if the clerics think they can subdue Iranian women they are mistaken. At every age and economic level, women resent the restraints and are struggling to overcome them. The clearest sign was the overwhelming majority of women who voted in May for Mohammad Khatami.

Propelled by the support of women and

young people, he easily defeated the presidential candidate favoured by the conservative clerics.

Mr. Khatami, a cleric himself, may not soon deliver the changes women want, in part because reform is opposed by the religious leaders who still control the military and security services and dictate the laws of Iran. But even without much help from Mr. Khatami, women clearly intend to press for change in everything from the dress code to the divorce and inheritance laws that discriminate against them.

The dress restrictions are dehumanising, submerging the individual identity of women in a colourless sea. Not a single woman in Tehran, a dusty metropolis of 12 million people, dares wear anything other than a dark, bulky raincoat or black chador, the traditional Islamic cloak, and no woman leaves home without a scarf or other head covering, even on scorching summer days.

But many women I met, while resentful of the dress standards, are troubled more by inequities in the law. Men can divorce their wives without cause at any time and are automatically awarded custody of children. Wives who outlive their husbands are generally permitted a much smaller inheritance than men who outlive their wives, regardless of variations in income.

"These are violations of our human rights," Shirin Ebadi, a former judge, told

me. Ms. Ebadi lost her job after the Iranian revolution in 1979, when the victorious clerics ruled that women could not be judges. A ban that was only ended recently. She has worked quietly but persistently since then to expand women's rights.

By avoiding overt political activity, and limiting her comments to legal matters, Ms. Ebadi has found a form of dissent the authorities seem willing to tolerate, though she has no guarantee that will last.

"I am walking on an edge," she said. Though women from affluent, educated families lived more freely before the clerics took power, there is little nostalgia here for Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. His was a corrupt, oppressive regime that limited opportunities for women in other ways. The enrollment of women in universities is much higher now than it was under the shah, and many go on to work as teachers, accountants, bankers, doctors and members of parliament.

But even for them there is no escaping the unequal laws and stifling customs of Islamic fundamentalism. The ruling clerics would be wise to let Mr. Khatami relax the restrictions. The women who gather each morning in Mellat Park, and millions like them across Iran, are a powerful political force impatient for change.

This article is reprinted from the International Herald Tribune.

LETTERS

Cheating the customer

To the editor:

I READ with interest your article on page 3 (Jordan Times Dec. 30, 1997) titled "Gas cylinder distributors, petrol stations plan to begin open strike Thursday," by Tareq Ayyoub, and immediately arranged for my central heating tank to be topped up the same day.

Your report suggests that suppliers to the public receive only 1 per cent of the cost for each litre of diesel. I assume that this means that only 1 per cent of the charge to the householder ends up in the pocket of the distributor who is also forbidden from making any delivery charge. If this is true then this obliges the distributor to cheat the public by overcharging or go out of this business. In short the supplier gets JD10 for each 1000 litres of diesel delivered to the householders' tank.

From this the distributor has to support the purchase of the delivery truck, a larger storage tank at his base, maintenance of these, and wages for a driver and himself to live. Without an additional delivery charge this is not possible and if as suggested a 30-year-old set of rules govern this that have not been reviewed realistically since then some serious negligence has occurred.

My tank was filled by adding 520 litres, by my measurement, but I was charged for 700 litres by the vendor who could not prove his measurement. This means I overpaid by 40 per cent as a result of deliberate fraud. This I strongly object to but would not object to a fair delivery charge. I can see that this type of fraud must be common otherwise these fuels would never reach the consumers.

Robert W. Yardy
 Amman

Society on the move

Jumping on the bandwagon

Something citizens can look forward to in the new year are the results of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Social Development on job-satisfaction among civil servants. As the government implements measures to upgrade performance and thus the efficiency of its ministries, departments and agencies, the results of such a survey are expected to prove useful. The responses will reveal how the survey sample of 3,000 government employees feel about administrative policies, inter-departmental relations and cooperation, job security, opportunities for promotion, remuneration and benefits, and recognition and appreciation from superiors, among other elements.

V FOR VACCINE: The work of Mukhlis Ammarin and Georg Weiland has been recognised with special distinction by the issuance of a Royal Decree. The decree bestows on both veterinarians the Al Hussein Medal of the First Order for their outstanding achievements in seeing through the privatisation of the Jordan Centre for Veterinary Vaccines. The original government project was one of the socio-economic projects earmarked in the 1986-90 Five-Year-Plan. Four agreements were reached between Jordan and Germany whereby through the German Development Agency (GTZ) experts would be seconded to Jordan's Ministry of Agriculture to assist in the project. Once off the ground, having successfully produced several batches of veterinary vaccines for application in Jordan, the project was found to have significant capability but few markets for channelling its products (the local market having been sufficiently supplied). So the government decided to study the prospects of commercialising the centre, and in April 1996 privatisation was completed resulting in a joint venture between private investors (55%), the Jordanian government (20%), and a Jordanian-Iraqi company (25%). Located in Yajouz, the JCVV, which has been certified as conforming to European manufacturing and laboratory standards, today produces about 20 vaccines for local and international markets. Mr. Ammarin, 55, and a graduate of Cairo University, University of California at Davis and the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, is head of the Veterinary Medicine Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, and Mr. Weiland is the expert from Germany who has been assisting in the project.

WHERE TO MEET: Another project, but one that was spurred during HRH Crown Prince Hassan's recent visit to Doha, will see the construction of a 12,000-square-metre conference hall in Amman, donated by the government of Qatar. While the Crown Prince was in Qatar, the coincidence of conversation brought forth the subject of the Qataris' meeting facilities for the Middle East and North Africa summit last November. Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifeh Al Thani later informed the Crown

Prince that he would offer to build a similar facility for Jordan. That settled, last week a Qatari delegation headed by Mohammad Al Amadi, head of the technical department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, arrived in Amman to scout about and discuss the project with Jordanian officials. The Qatari team met with Deputy Prime Minister Jawad Anani and Minister of Public Works Nasser Lawzi. In addition a committee formed of Jordan's ministers of Tourism, Culture and Youth, Finance, Public Works, and Industry, Trade and Supply will be charged with the progress of the conference hall project. The Jordanian officials, after a little and unsuccessful tug-of-war with Army officials over a coveted plot of land already marked for new military headquarters, finally decided on a government plot north of the King Hussein Medical City. The officials gave the Qataris the plans, and the visiting delegation will return with a proposal and will announce a competition for Jordanian engineers for the contracting of various units of the project. The facility will contain a main hall to accommodate 3,000 people, other meeting rooms for committees, an administration building, landscaping and parking.

WARM SEND-OFF: Other Gulf related news is that Mohammad Bassam, number two diplomat at Saudi Arabia's embassy in Amman, is preparing to leave for Turkey soon to head his country's mission at the end of his five-year tour of duty in Jordan. He served in Tunis, Cairo, London and Conakry, Guinea before arriving in Amman in late 1992 to take over as chargé d'affaires at the height of Saudi-Jordanian tension caused by the Gulf crisis. But for the low-profile career diplomat, his Jordanian experience was rewarding — both professionally and personally. In the absence of an ambassador in Jordan for several years, many officials credit Mr. Bassam with helping break the ice in bilateral ties by exerting strenuous behind-the-scenes efforts with Riyadh and Amman. In September, the Saudi Council of Ministers promoted him to the rank of ambassador from minister plenipotentiary, and he was notified of his new post in November. Mr. Bassam, who has begun clearing his desk and packing his bags, says he will miss his many friends and colleagues. "For me, Jordan was my second home...and its people were very, very generous and hospitable," he said. "I have a lot of friends that I will miss and I find it difficult to leave...But for me, friendships do not end with distance." The U.S.-educated diplomat is married with three daughters.

TO GATHER STANDS: Arriving in Jordan this week is Britain's Lord Waverly. Scheduled to initiate a debate this month in the House of Lords on the Middle East, Lord Waverly, 49, and an independent, will be in the region to explore several positions on the Arab-Israeli peace process.

He will visit Jerusalem and Israel after meeting with HRH Crown Prince Hassan and other intellectuals in Jordan. Lord Waverly's hereditary peerage began when his father was recognised for having invented the Anderson Tunnel, an air raid shelter.

PRELUDE EXCLUDED: Al Arab Al Yawm columnist Mohammad Subeichi took issue last week with the not so distant forbidden practice of playing the national anthem in public movie theatres as a warm up to the movie. Subeichi's particular itch was the propriety, better still impropriety, of playing the anthem prior to what he finds as lude and obscene films. He went so far as to question whether the playing of the anthem ahead of such movies indicated that the state was in favour of their public presentation. The writer did indicate that the government, through the Press and Publications Department, issued a circular that was sent to movie theatres ordering them to no longer play the nation's anthem in their establishments.

TAX FREE: Sharia judges were granted a substantial money saving perk last week. The Cabinet, following through on a recommendation from the Minister of Finance, Suleiman Hafez, has decreed that Islamic Court judges of the first rank will be exempt from paying customs and sales tax on one car, and only one car, during their tenures. The issuance of "duty free tags" is a sore spot among many people, and measures were taken last year to cut down on the list of those who would be extended this privilege.

TUNE IN: Good news has been reported for members of the Filipino community not only in Jordan but in the Middle East and Europe. ART has added a new Filipino Channel to its existing 15 ethnic and niche channels in Arabsat, says Radi Alkhas, vice president for technology and development of Arab Radio & Television. The channel derives its programmes from the Philippines and transmits them to the Middle East and Europe, as well as to the U.S.

where the channel has been made available for some time. According to Mr. Alkhas, a former director of Jordan Television, ART, which was established in October 1993 and is privately owned by Sheikh Saleh Kamel and Prince Waleed Bin Talal of Saudi Arabia, will expand its network operations to 25 television channels during 1998. ART was the first pay satellite network made publicly available in Jordan. Today this production house provides 24-hours of Arabic movies, sports, video clips, musical concerts, children's programming, news and entertainment around the world.



Mariana Far and Omar Halasa

SMOKED SALMON & SALSA: Year end nuptials were celebrated all last week when Mariana Sleiman Far, former 8 o'clock news anchor for JTV, wed Omar Jamil Halasa, an engineer living and working in Australia. The couple were friends for many years, a courtship sprung, and suddenly Omar was on his knees proposing. Mariana says she accepted because her phone bills were skyrocketing. Omar, a runner, was seen running in shorts an hour before the wedding! He was still on time arriving for the marriage ceremony in Sweifiah even before the guests. A Philippine choir sang Christmas carols and Bishop Sylvestros Far - Mariana's cousin - presided over the ceremony, making it a bit longer as favour - a misunderstanding! The newlyweds will leave for Australia Saturday. Their friends in the press corps wish them all happiness.

Wishing you and yours a healthy and happy new year and a spiritually fulfilling Ramadan.

Jennifer Hamarneh

Looking at Amman from new horizons

Mayor Abbadi illustrates plans to revitalise capital, integrate all sectors in development process

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Now that the infrastructure skeleton of the nation's capital has been put into place, it is time to flesh out the city by developing poorer areas, beautifying the city, and exalting both the modern and classical aspects of Amman, said Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi.

The first step in Dr. Abbadi's plan for developing Amman was reducing

traffic congestion and making the city more driver-friendly. Tunnels and bridges were constructed to relieve the hours-long smog and heat infested waits at Dawar Al Dakhaliyah and the Third Circle, which came to shape the irritable manner with which most Jordanians took to driving in Amman.

Now that the Wadi Haddadeh tunnel, the Gardens-Sport City tunnel, the Dawar Al Madinah bridge

and the strategically-located pedestrian tunnels have reduced some of the traffic problems, the mayor and the City Council are now focusing on developing the eastern part of the city, to raise it to the economic and aesthetic level of the western half, Dr. Abbadi said.

"In the past, Wadi Haddadeh was a separate part of the city. People living there were isolated from the progress in other parts of Amman... now we have

brought development to them, and in the near future, the rest of Amman," said the mayor. The Wadi Haddadeh tunnels located in downtown Amman has now become the link to a series of highways that stretch out across the Kingdom.

According to Dr. Abbadi, in the future, highways to the north and east will be linked to this tunnel to make the centre of the capital, tying both east and west Amman, as accessible as possible to all Ammanites and Jordanians at large.

Another goal of the eastern sector's development is to increase real estate value, the highest source of income in Jordan, "so that they too may have a better standard of living," he stressed.

Sources say that residents of Wadi Haddadeh, for example, have already started selling real estate along roads near the tunnel at commercial zone prices in expectation of the commercialisation there hinted at by the mayor.

However, Dr. Abbadi's plans for developing Amman's "poorer neighbourhoods" are not solely restricted to Wadi Haddadeh.

In Qweismeh, a quarter



Al Hussein Forest in Wadi Qattar near Salhiat Al Abed

of the Wihdat neighbourhood, east Amman's youth have something to look forward to as a new sports city on par with the Al Hussein Sports City in west Amman rises on the location of an old sheep souq. "I want to encourage the youth of this country to take a greater role in sports," says Dr. Abbadi. "I want to make sure that not one single citizen ever

feels left out of the progress and development in this country." As such, street peddlers and green grocers have nothing to fear, said Mayor Abbadi. At a rate of JD30 per month, Amman's vendors will have a new roofed market near the bustling southern travel terminal in the coming 70 days. The roofed market will replace their traditional location in

the heart of the Wihdat refugee camp, home to 120,000 refugees.

"I want to preserve their ['vendors'] livelihood, which is why the roofed souq was built... The souq has proper plumbing, sewage and electric services to give a more 'civilised' feel to vegetable selling."

To balance the increasing urbanism of Amman, Dr. Abbadi envisions "surrounding Amman with a halo of trees to prevent dust from polluting the city... so that in the future, Amman may have a cooler and cleaner climate." The Al Hussein and Al Hassan parks in Wadi Qattar near Salhiat Al Abed and Ain Ghazal, respectively, are now being planted with thousands of fruit and forest trees to achieve this, he said.

However, the icing on the cake of Mayor Abbadi's vision of the capital's heritage and cultural identity are the themes of Amman's seven hilltops and the valley that runs between them.

The top of the wadi, where springs once watered its banks, is slated

for a cultural development that includes a new national public library, a museum, a theatre, public gardens and the new City Hall building.

"I picked this location because it lies in between the seven hilltops of Amman and [the improvements will] give the people who live here, in this neighbourhood, something to enrich their eyes," Dr. Abbadi explained.

In a move to combine the modern hi-tech aspects of Amman with ancient Philadelphia, Dr. Abbadi has developed plans to "put rows of big screen TVs in the Hashemite plaza near the amphitheatre during the World Cup finals so that Ammanites can walk down to watch."

Amman has thousands of steps that link downtown Amman to the tops of its seven hilltops.

With prospects of faster routes between different quarters of the city, a "greener" climate and a more civic touch to the capital, Ammanites and visitors to Jordan can sense the swiftly approaching spirit of the 21st century.

Too young for that?

By Jean-Claude Elias

IN THE world of music it is known that in order to become a professional performer one must start learning to play as early as possible. Children who, sometimes as young as four, take the long road of music education, often produce amazing results. There are numerous stories of young prodigies who became virtuosi of international fame at 15 or 16 years of age. Gymnasts too start very young and reach the peak of their career in their teens. There has recently been a debate on how early children can learn about computers and how safe it is to let them do so. There is more than one answer to such a question.

PCs have become multi-purpose machines, and it is therefore impossible to give one single definition of their usage. From games to financial calculations, from Internet browsing to sending faxes, from machine control to flight simulation and from word processing to digital music production, personal computers cover a range of applications as wide as life itself. There is now a programme for everyone, however young.

Disney Productions for example have a set of educational games for children aged between 4 and 8, based on their successful cartoons The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, The Lion King, Pocahontas and others. But although kids make their first acquaintance with the machine through such specifically designed programmes, they often leave the main road and enjoy exploring byways. They usually end up

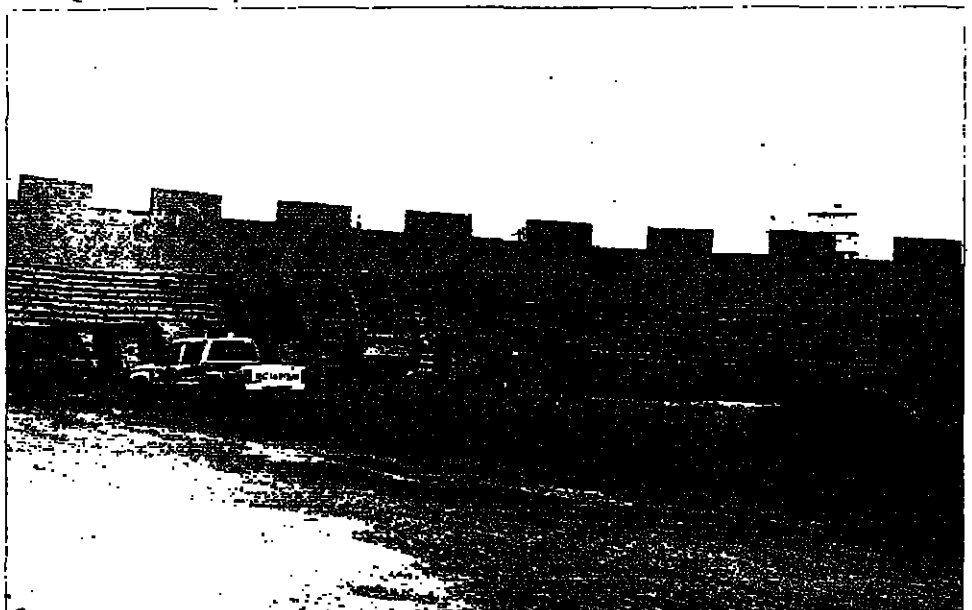
chip talk



knowing as much as adults about very technical aspects of computers. I know of a 9-year-old girl who can enter Windows 95 and modify its working parameters quicker than some technicians.

Advanced word processing has no secrets for her, nor has simple graphic design software like PrintShop Deluxe for instance. Of course complex calculations and sophisticated use of Excel spreadsheet are still beyond her ability. Whatever the type of programmes they would use pre-teen children develop a natural, friendly knowledge of personal computers and their basic operation. Contrary to some adults, children do not know what computer phobia is. The keyboard and the mouse are natural extension of their fingers. What matters more than the kind of programmes they operate is how comfortable they feel using the machine. Later, when they grow up they can be more selective and become truly professional in a more specific direction.

As far as "danger" is concerned, analysts estimate that computers are far less harmful than television or video, be it at the physical or psychological level. Modern PCs are equipped with high quality monitors (screens) that cause less eye fatigue than a mediocre TV tube. Moreover, using a personal computer is an active occupation while watching TV is a passive one. Overall, and unless a child spends too many hours a day on it, operating a PC is not only a healthy exercise, but is a factor that positively contributes to the development of the little ones' mind.



Construction proceeds on the new sports city in Qweismeh

Jordan bourse ends '97 trading on poor trend

AMMAN (R) — Jordan's stock prices ended 1997 trading on a poor trend on Tuesday, closing weaker amid selling pressures which undermined window dressing deals to prop up year-end closing prices, dealers said.

The official 60-share Amman Financial Market (AFM) index ended 0.50 per cent lower at 169.24 points in turnover of 2.5 million dinars (\$3.5 million).

The Amman bourse, which traditionally closes on New Year's Eve to help brokers close accounts, will resume trading on Jan. 3. New Year's day is a public holiday and Friday, Jan. 2, is the normal weekly holiday.

Dealers said across the board selling pressure emerged, weakening price levels and hampering efforts of local funds to push up year-end closing prices in window dressing transactions.

"It was a bleak picture to end 1997 trading, there was hardly any real demand and a downward trend for most stock," said broker Husam Al Hanbali.

Even the few bloc trades which accounted for most of the volume and were executed by funds to push higher year-end closing prices mostly failed as selling pressure weighed down on shares.

Jordan Investment Finance Bank shed 0.10 dinars to 2.30 dinars in the largest deal of the day, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of Tuesday's volume.

Another bloc trade worth 541,780 dinars in industrial bank was unchanged at 1.70 dinars.

The only significant activity, in an otherwise poor market dominated by bloc trades, was the demand which surfaced on Jordan Cement Factories, which rose 0.02 dinars to 3.02 dinars in a healthy 236,537 dinars worth of trade.

Most of the week's trading was dominated by window dressing deals, mainly engineered by local funds to push up select stock in a traditional year-end practice.

Market activity has been hit by lack of demand, shortage of liquidity and an absence of foreign interest which has kept investors on the sidelines.

The private sector index of the 45 best-performing shares in terms of turnover and performance shed 0.58 per cent to 84.23 points, up one per cent from the start of the year.

Arab countries start reducing customs duties

CAIRO (AFP) — Most Arab countries will reduce their customs duties on certain items beginning Thursday in a move toward setting up an Arab common market, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid said Wednesday.

The reciprocal 10 per cent cut in duties for some merchandise "is a historic advance toward establishing an Arab common market in a world dominated by international economic blocs," Dr. Abdul Meguid told reporters.

The decision was made during a Dec. 10 meeting of Arab League member countries' customs directors.

Tariff reductions, agreed by 17 of the League's 21 member states, will be made over a 10-year period until they have been entirely eliminated.

Their accord covers 92 per cent of inter-Arab trade, valued at \$160 billion, Dr.

Abdul Meguid said. Algeria, the Comoros, Djibouti and Mauritania, which did not sign the 1981 framework agreement on developing trade, are not affected by Thursday's reductions.

In addition, the Palestinian National Authority signed the agreement but cannot implement it, as trade between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Arab countries is under Israeli control.

Dr. Abdul Meguid said Mauritania has promised to join the agreement while "contacts" on the matter were underway with Algeria, which represented five per cent of inter-Arab trade in 1987.

Some signatory countries, such as Kuwait, will not implement the reductions on products such as tobacco, wine and other alcoholic beverages "for health or religious reasons," Dr. Abdul Meguid said.

Libya says '97, '98 budgets without deficit

TUNIS (R) — Libya said that its budget for the fiscal year 1997 as well as the budget for 1998 were balanced without deficit despite the United Nations sanctions imposed on it since 1992.

Prime Minister Abdul Majid Al Gu'ud said the 1998 budget approved by the General People's Congress (GPC) this week was set at 5.311 billion dinars (\$13.759 billion at the official rate), down 70 million dinars from 5.381 billion dinars in 1997.

The GPC is the country's top legislative body.

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 6.0 per cent at current prices in 1997 from a previous forecast of 5.5 per cent, and the target for the 1998 GDP was 7.0 per cent at current prices, he added.

GDP grew at 11.6 per cent at current prices in 1997 in non-energy sectors which represented 77 per cent of the total, Mr. Gu'ud said.

Energy represents about 95 per cent of Libya's foreign currency earnings.

Real GDP growth was put at 0.7 per cent in 1996, at 2.0 per cent in 1995, and minus

4.5 per cent in 1994.

"The 1998 budget is set without deficit and carries no increase in the public debt," Mr. Gu'ud told the GPC at debates over the weekend.

"We have implemented the 1997 budget without deficit despite the sanctions and the attacks by enemies. We are proud of this," he added. Parts of the five-day debates of the second session of the GPC this year at the coastal city of Sirte, 450 kilometres east of Tripoli, were broadcast by the Libyan state-run television monitored in neighbouring Tunisia.

Sanctions imposed on Libya since 1992 by the United Nations Security Council over the Lockerbie affair, including the freezing of some of its foreign assets in the Western countries, have compounded Libya's economic woes.

As a result, just about every segment of the economy was hurt, and the government was forced to cut its expenditures and investments. A recent Libyan official report puts the country's total losses from the sanctions at some \$24 billion.

One million Indonesians lose jobs

JAKARTA (AP) — An estimated one million workers lost their jobs this year because of Indonesia's economic crisis, an Indonesian chamber of commerce and industry official was quoted as saying.

"A source at ministry of labour said probably the dismissals of workers by the end of this year could number one million," Aburizal Bakrie, the chamber's general chairman, was quoted by the newspaper Kompas as saying.

Officials at the ministry were not immediately available for comment. The fallout from a dramatic currency crisis has arrested once booming economic growth in Indonesia. The value of the rupiah has plummeted about 60 per cent this year, making it one of the world's worst performing currencies.

The chamber predicted in a report that economic growth in 1998 would decrease to between three or four per cent compared with an estimated rate of 6.5 per cent in 1997.

Details of the report were published in Kompas on Tuesday.

Many businesses with big debts in foreign currencies are facing tough times despite a \$40 billion economic rescue package put together by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Radius Prawiro, a close advisor to President Suharto and a former cabinet minister, called on businessmen unable to pay their debts to close down their businesses.

"We ought to close down unproductive businesses. I think it's the best way to prevent more disastrous effects to the economy," Mr. Radius told reporters.

The chamber's report said property, construction, and banking had been the hardest hit sectors so far.

It said the property sector had already laid off about 40,000 workers.

He said the Indonesian Textile Association had predicted that as many as 300,000 workers could lose their jobs next year.

Indonesia has an estimated workforce of 91 million.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 2, 1998

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — A team can achieve great things. But it takes a strong leader to keep everyone motivated and on track. To find out if that's you, talk to the person in your group who's the least likely to say anything. This one is also quite sensitive to what's going on. He or she is the most likely to see what you're missing.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — A friend or loved one can give you the insight you've been looking for. This is not necessarily an older person — it could just as easily be a child. You're a very compassionate person, and today even more than usual. Put that compassion to work listening to a young person and you'll learn a valuable lesson.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Even if you don't have to go to work today, think about career options. What do you want to accomplish by this time next year? And the year after that? Jot these things down and you improve your chances of achieving them. Don't wait for somebody to offer you the promotion or make your life work. It's up to you.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Where are you and your mate going on your vacation? Tahiti? Acapulco? The Far East? Delineate what you have to do to get there. It will take all your talents to accomplish it. It will also be very bonding. Your lives will never be the same, and neither will your partnership.

LEO (July 23-August 22) — You're under pressure to take care of business. You could make quite a bit of money, and elevate your status in the community. Unfortunately, there's no easy way to get through this assignment. That's OK. If it wasn't a challenge it wouldn't be as satisfying. You'll see by the end of today. Good luck.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) — You could fall in love — with a person you've loved for years, or someone brand new. He or she has a fabulous imagination. You two come up with some crazy ideas, and you could make them happen. Each of you contributes your own expertise. Together you accomplish more than either could alone.

LIBRA (September 23-October 23) — You need to be listening, watching and even second-guessing. Those who need your help the most aren't asking for it. You'll have to go to them and provide what they need. This is a skill you could develop into a profitable business. Remember that line about finding a need and filling it?

SCORPIO (October 24-November 21) — Working together, you and your sweetheart can take on a bigger challenge. So as you're making New Year's resolutions, think of one that's big and scary and so significant that you'll be really tickled once you master it. Put it on your list. This is only a game, remember?

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) — Stop on the way home and get something you need for the house. By fixing up your private space, you'll be able to take on something you thought intimidating. Confidence is a by-product of making your environment more comfortable and with it you can achieve great things. This could be the theme for your whole year.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) — You're strong, good-looking and intelligent. A friend who knows something you don't would like to help you learn. Don't hesitate to ask for coaching. You might even hire it. If you hire neighbours to teach you a skill, you'll be giving as well as taking. That's a win-win situation.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) — This is a good day to shop. Get things that are on somebody else's list as well as your own. If you think today in terms of what other people want, you could achieve something you thought impossible. If you do unto others what you'd have them do unto you — they might. And you might both be a lot better off because of it.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) — This is the day to start your New Year's projects. If you started yesterday, start them again today. Why not? Something from the past will contribute to your success in the future. Figure out what it is and apply it, and the problem is solved.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 1998

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — You and your friends can get a lot done today. First, get organized. Ask everyone to list what they think are the most important tasks, and how they should be done. Give the lists to the best organizer in your group, and the amount of work you generate today will be awesome.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — This will be a good year as far your career is concerned. The work will come in hot and heavy. You're lucky with practical matters, so set goals a little higher. You can get into a secure position that meets all your needs and more. It will take work, but you can do it.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Watch for an excellent opportunity to travel and you'll be lucky in relationships with foreigners. How about taking a class in a foreign language? You may end up learning two or three languages just for the fun of it. Become a citizen of the world in the full sense of the phrase.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — You need to figure out what you want to accomplish. In your case, you'll be setting this goal for yourself and for a partner. You'll be working together to achieve the result. Once your partnership is firmly established, pool your resources so you can buy something that will benefit you both.

LEO (July 23-August 22) — You like to figure out what other people need, then serve them by telling what it is. This year, you may get to serve in a more hands-on way. There may actually be work involved. Set up a goal for yourself this year that involves a lot of work and you will achieve more than you give.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) — There's one job you do very well. It's something others can't do well, but you haven't able to take their compliments because you think it's so easy. Why don't you look at it from their point of view? Then you'll be able to accept the compliment, with gratitude.

LIBRA (September 23-October 23) — This is a great day to stay home with loved ones. If you have today off, celebrate and set goals for the future. There's one you haven't quite put into words yet. See if you can dig it out, dust it off and write it down. It'll be inspiration to the whole bunch of you.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 21) — You're in the mood to learn. Might as well learn things you can use around the house. In your present frame of mind, you can learn how to fix anything. You could make this part of your New Year's resolutions. Learn to fix things all year long. You could even learn to fix something very, very big. Think about it.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) — Would you like to be fabulously wealthy? Well, you'll probably have to know something you don't already know. An educational programme is definitely recommended. A friend can even point you in the right direction. This New Year's resolution will pay off very well.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) — You want to learn how to make money, and how to invest it. If you do the homework, you'll make money from your money. You didn't think you had the aptitude. What's important is whether you have the patience. You don't have to know this instinctively. You can learn it — that's your assignment.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) — Your resolution this year has to do with saving money, finishing up old chores and increasing your self-esteem. These tasks may all be linked. You get things checked off your list, you end up feeling better about yourself, and you have more money in the bank. That's the objective.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) — This year, your goal involves teamwork. A partner helps you to stay on schedule. It's also important to finish things you've begun. Make a list of those, to add to your New Year's resolutions. This will make the endeavour more likely. If you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you get there?

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Why not?
- Brins of coll. sports
- Hidden supply
- River through Florence
- Hungarian violinist
- Celine film
- Presidential initials
- Designer Oscar de la
- Elevator man
- J. Davis's grp.
- Inclination
- One of The Judds
- Step up
- Arrest record
- Gooden, to fans
- Inclination
- Maddler family flower
- Long times
- Finalists
- determiner
- Polynesian beverage
- Magnani and Freud
- Euripedes subject
- Balm-sized
- Charred
- Attendance check
- Oliver Stone movie
- Custard tart
- Say more
- Island in the Marianas
- Provide with property
- Espionage initials
- Jewish teacher
- Time periods
- Downtown Chicago
- Spanish hero
- High-lit
- Pencor's silhouette

DOWN

- Actor Bert
- Highland Gaelic
- Television initials
- Not so harsh
- Former Mid-East nat.
- King novel
- Louie in a car
- Actor Alan
- Solo of "Star Wars"
- Aged
- Labor initials
- Chest bones
- vu
- Polonium
- Laertes, et al.
- Memo acronym
- Timothy Hutton movie
- Powerful sphere
- Dairy product
- Brainstorms
- Herman's singer
- Appear to be
- Lewis's Gantry
- Merriment
- Writer Madame de
- Venice beach
- Gandhi's garb
- 42 individuality
- Form datum
- Marcus or Irwin
- Canines
- "In the Wind"
- Microwaved, so to speak
- Square measure
- Gauge face
- Taj Mahal city
- Advanced degs.
- Orchestra member
- Help with the dishes
- Japanese sash
- Silly Caesar
- Cigar end

Peanuts

I WANTED TO BUY PEGGY JEAN SOME GLOVES FOR CHRISTMAS, BUT THEY COST TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS.

SHE'S GOING TO BE DISAPPOINTED WHEN SHE FINDS OUT HER BOYFRIEND IS A CHEAPSKATE.

I'M NOT A CHEAPSKATE. I JUST DON'T HAVE TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS.

PUT IT ON YOUR CREDIT CARD.

I DON'T HAVE A CREDIT CARD.

SO LONG, PEGGY JEAN!

Andy Capp

GOOD RIDDANCE, EH, FLO?

GET LOST, PERRY!

SHE'S SO DISENCHANTED WITH HIM, HE'S PUT HER OFF BEING EXHAUSTED BY ANYBODY ELSE.

Mutt'n' Jeff

JEFF, I'M TRANSFERRING YOU FROM FRUITS AND VEGETABLES TO FROZEN FOODS!

GOSH, BOSS. COULDN'T YOU WAIT UNTIL THE HOT SUMMER?

CAN'T THERE BE AN AMPL. LOT OF FISH MISSING LATELY? NEED A MAN THERE!

FROZEN FOOD

FISH CLAMS

CHICKEN

SOUS

3-2-91

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen

"How can I get any work done when people in other time zones are already home watching TV?"

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

UNAF

DYNBA

ELBARR

ELCHEK

This has got to stop!

BELT TIGHTENING CALLS FOR THIS.

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: A

Yesterday's Jumbles: BRINY SUAVE POLICY DECODE
Answer: What the crooked politician was involved in when he painted the office — A COVER UP

HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 1998

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — You may have forgotten something you promised to do, but the person you promised didn't forget. If you're wondering who this is, look around. Who's leaning on you and looking plaintively up at you? It's simple, really. All you have to do is ask, "Is there something I said I'd do for you?"

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — You can tell whether it's going to rain by looking at the clouds or whether it'll be cold winter by looking at the fur on the neighbourhood squirrels. You're good at this sort of thing, and today you're even better. Follow up on hunches you get based on these sorts of minute observations. You're right on target.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — You need to learn something related to your career. You don't think you can learn it, or you just don't want to. But people are saying, "If you only knew, such and such, we'd give you that promotion." And you're arguing. Talk it over with an older person. He or she can see clearly what you're missing.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — A bossy friend is driving you crazy. But this person looks like the key to your success this year, and especially today. He or she can see a great opportunity for you both. You've been resisting, and with good reason. Look anew at the situation. This time your friend is right. Acquiesce.

LEO (July 23-August 23) — Instead of avoiding difficulties, be helpful. You'll notice that you're getting more attention. People are looking at you in a slightly different way. Offer your services, where they're needed and practice doing what others tell you. You have to learn how to serve well before you know how to lead well.

VIRGO (August 23-September 23) — You're very tuned in to details. Sometimes that makes you seem critical. The person most important in your life needs your support and love. If you give it unconditionally, you'll see this person getting better with details. What he or she wants from you in return is simply acknowledgement.

LIBRA (September 23-October 23) — Something you're doing now is going to open a door so that you can be more successful later. To put it in practical terms, you're laying groundwork. This is not time wasted. It's a very important part of the project. Settle down and do it right. If you don't, your oversight will be apparent later.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 21) — There may be a conflict between your sweetheart and your friends. You want to be both places at once, and you might be able to do it. Just talk your sweetheart into going with you to do what your friends want to do. It could be easier than you thought, and more fun than your sweetheart thought, too.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) — Your house is your haven. This year it will propel you into success greater than your most magnificent dreams. An investment and commitment are required. It's hard to tell which is more threatening, but you won't get there unless you do both. Figure out how to make it happen. Also, take time to listen to a quiet one.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) — You might need to take a long trip this weekend, but there's too much going on here. Can you communicate with the person far away via phone or fax? Would that person come here? Can you do business by mail? Your attention may be there, but your physical presence is here.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) — Instead of spending money today, how about putting it with someone else's stash and saving up enough to buy something really magnificent? This person may even be someone you don't like much, but this year you'll be able to accomplish great things. Go for it.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) — With your considerable imagination, you can come up with all kinds of ideas. If you get together with buddies to play them out, a friend can help. He or she will do the stuff you don't enjoy, like going to the store for snacks. You can make it happen, so you might as well.

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The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates

Prices as at 31/12/97 19:44

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.7975	0.6080	1.4593	130.45	1.4291	1758.35	2.0269	6.0190
DE Mark	0.5583	-	0.3378	0.8117	72.56	0.7946	983.24	1.1272	3.3470
GB Sterling	1.8448	2.9586	-	2.3996	216.10	2.3506	2908.58	3.3338	9.9001
JP Franc	0.8863	123.08	0.4161	-	89.35	0.9786	1210.87	136.64	4.1215
CH Yen	0.0077	1.3774	0.4658	1.1183	-	1.0981	13.56	155.28	4.6123
CA Dollar	0.6997	1.2391	0.4147	1.0022	1.10	-	1217.25	1.3953	4.1427
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0163	0.3435	0.0825	1357.04	0.8080	-	11.46	3.4030
NL Guilder	0.4934	88.69	0.2997	72.02	64.33	0.7051	872.14	-	2.9880
FR Franc	0.1661	0.2986	0.1008	24.2445	21.55	0.2374	33.57	33.6700	-

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7085	3.7502	0.0000	0.0000	0.3048	5.6724	1522.00
Jordan Dinar	1.4114	-	5.2932	0.0000	0.0000	0.4301	5.1833	2148.20
Saudi Riyal	0.2587	0.1889	-	0.0000	0.0000	0.0813	0.98	405.85
Bahrain Dinar	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	-	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
Qatar Dinar	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	-	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
Kuwait Dinar	3.2814	2.3249	12.3068	0.0000	0.00	-	12.05	4984.26
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1929	1.0212	0.0000	0.0000	0.0830	-	414.44
Lebanese/1000	0.66	0.4655	2.4640	0.0000	0.0000	0.2002	2.4129	-
Egyptian	0.2946	0.2087	1.1046	0.0000	0.0000	0.0898	1.0817	448.31

Energy

Oil's	Last	Previous
Brent	16.04	16.19
W. Texas	17.73	17.57
Bonny	16.04	16.19
Dubai	14.90	15.20
UL Gas	169.00	0.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2667	0.4796	0.16212	0.38942	34.7983
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.48974	0.16555	0.39768	35.5353
KW Dinar	3.2814	5.89971	1.99402	4.78927	428.082
BH Dinar	0.0000	4.74608	1.6	3.88802	344.59
CY Pound	1.8902	3.3989	1.1489	2.7594	246.668

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)

Period	-1-	-3-	-6-	-9-	-12-
Cncy	Month	Months	Months	Months	Year
USD	5.62	5.62	5.58	5.75	5.84
GBP	7.31	7.48	7.44	7.44	7.44
JPY	0.16	0.36	0.35	0.25	0.35
DEM	3.26	3.38	3.50	3.75	3.84
FRF	3.45	3.58	3.69	3.79	3.87
CHF	1.06	1.38	1.44	1.64	1.72
ITL	5.93	5.81	5.50	5.18	5.06

Main Equity Indices

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cts
New York	DOW JONES	7910.49	-5.48	-0.07	7912.13	7892.3	7915.97
New York	S&P 500	969.84	-1	-0.1	972.76	967.41	970.84
London	FT-SE 100	5135.5	3.2	0.06	5182.3	5133.1	5132.3
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	16258.74	483.52	3.27	16259.3	14838.5	14775.2
Paris	CAC 40	2998.91	23.44	0.79	3007.28	2972.55	2975.47
Frankfurt	DAX	4248.69	52.32	1.25	4279.45	4222.56	4197.37

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHARISANI TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179 ORGANIZED MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (27/12/1997 - 30/12/1997) WEEKLY REPORT



DURING THE LAST 1 WEEKS	COMPANY NAME	P/E	DIV	NO. OF CONTRACTS	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSING PRICE	CHANGE	AVERAGE MARKET PRICE	TURNOVER	NO. OF TRADING DAYS
HIGH	LOW													
333.060	324.750	ARAB BANK	14.9	1.23	36	10300	3366620	324.75	327.50	320.00	325.00	324.935	234	4
1.911	1.790	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	-	0.00	53	315022	544674	1.79	1.80	1.77	1.78	1.792	750	4
5.000	5.000	CALRO AMMAN BANK	7.5	4.11	5	1300	4558	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.000	013	3
2.900	1.780	BANK OF JORDAN	5.6	0.00	12	7839	13286	1.95	1.95	1.87	1.78	1.899	058	3
1.300	1.000	WEL. BANK JOR. BK.	89.4	0.00	2	500	638	1.20	1.30	1.20	1.30	1.274	005	2
2.610	1.700	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	10.2	6.14	21	339700	561562	1.71	1.71	1.65	1.70	1.653	1925	4
5.220	5.100	THE WOUSUNG BK.	11.5	3.73	11	6262	32241	5.12	5.20	5.12	5.20	5.149	035	3
2.800	1.930	JOR. REALTY BANK	15.4	0.00	26	9414	18995	2.08	2.14	1.98	2.14	2.06	2017	4
1.740	1.400	JOR. GULF BANK	10.8	10.82	24	38750	25269	1.47	1.45	1.44	1.44	1.452	154	4
2.800	2.280	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	12.0	4.09	90	40868	98564	2.39	2.52	2.34	2.35	2.42	224	4
1.150	1.080	JOR. UNIV. BK. SAV. INV.	151.5	0.00	7	3550	3874	1.11	1.11	1.08	1.09	1.092	020	4
1.820	2.340	JOR. INV. FIN. BANK	14.8	0.00	33	300300	690720	2.45	2.40	2.30	2.30	2.300	3003	2
2.250	2.350	JOR. INV. FIN. BANK/WH	-	0.00	17	150100	33735	2.35	2.35	2.35	2.35	2.350	3003	2
2.170	2.500	ARAB BANKING CO.	21.3	0.00	6	1200	3469	3.17	3.26	2.89	2.94	3.058	008	4

BANKS	SECTOR				343	1225107	5702404	INDEX NUMBER	232.34	CHANGE	1.012		
2.750	2.700 JORDAN ASSURANCE	12.4	5.19	2	1000	2785	2.75	2.89	2.75	2.89	2.785	030	3
3.320	3.320 WIDIALE EAST INSUR.	10.5	3.20	1	250	868	3.32	3.47	3.47	3.47	3.472	011	1
1.920	1.900 ARABIAN SEAS INSUR.	10.9	0.00	2	350	538	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.978	028	2
3.900	3.900 JORDANIAN SEAS INSUR.	10.9	5.00	1	3800	12000	3.90	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.000	279	3
2.100	1.870 JOR. FREEMAN INSUR.	5.4	7.58	2	1000	1970	1.95	1.98	1.96	1.98	1.970	045	1
3.310	3.200 ALMISIR AL-ARABI	17.2	0.00	9	5500	19695	3.31	3.75	3.40	3.75	3.581	275	3

INSURANCE	SECTOR		17	11300	37855	INDEX NUMBER	122.05	CHANGE	4.735
1.950	1.910 JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	9.3	5.21	32	41422	79562	1.92 1.93 1.91 1.92	-	1.931 276 4
8.000	8.000 JOR. HOTEL TOURISM	13.4	1.25	4	1150	9970	8.00 8.00 8.40 8.80	+ .80	8.626 023 2
2.410	3.250 KEMEN MINERALS	16.0	4.28	3	615	2102	3.27 3.56 3.29 3.56	+ .28	3.29 2418 028 2
4.350	4.350 WELLS. OILFIELD PROD.	11.4	3.31	4	2800	2800	4.35 4.35 5.29 4.57	+ .52	4.94 1.905 055 4
4.490	3.550 ARAB INTL. HOTELS	15.2	4.05	10	18250	91146	4.49 5.20 4.71 4.94	+ .45	4.994 203 4
2.280	2.300 SHIPPING LINES	14.1	5.27	2	2600	5532	2.30 2.42 2.30 2.42	+ .12	2.305 025 2
1.100	1.090 NATL. PORTFOLIO	-	0.00	26	110450	110510	1.05 1.05 1.00 1.00	- .05	1.002 209 3
1.970	1.880 REAL ESTATE INV.	15.5	5.36	4	1000	1045	1.92 1.12 1.97 1.12	- .20	1.945 021 4
1.390	1.410 JORDAN INTL. TRAD.	22.4	0.00	22	14000	6450	1.41 1.42 1.41 1.42	+ .08	1.412 041 4
1.150	1.170 WID. EAST HOTELS	19.7	0.00	11	4700	5918	1.25 1.29 1.25 1.29	+ .04	1.259 092 2
4.000	3.730 ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	10.0	0.00	18	7779	30114	3.88 3.90 3.84 3.84	- .04	3.871 077 4
1.950	1.760 JORDAN REPEAT. INV.	-	0.00	2	500	511	1.95 1.95 1.90 1.95	- .10	1.902 010 2
1.980	1.980 REPEAT. EDUCATION	-	0.00	2	225	215	1.95 1.95 1.94 1.94	+ .01	1.956 005 2
1.700	1.640 UNIFIED CO.	8.1	6.43	12	33300	56420	1.68 1.72 1.69 1.71	+ .03	1.694 046 4
1.720	1.720 UNION LAND DEV.	-	0.00	9	12100	8399	1.72 1.71 1.67 1.71	- .01	1.694 242 3

SERVICES	SECTOR	160	248491	410790	INDEX NUMBER	116.62	CHANGE	3.185					
1.160	1.150 ATMOSPHERES	-	0.00	4	6250	7250	1.16	1.16	1.16	1.16	1.160	223	3
3.080	2.750 JOR. CHEMIST FACT.	20.3	3.44	144	116520	350880	2.83	3.05	2.83	3.02	3.011	193	4
3.600	3.550 JOR. PROSPERITY HUES	10.3	2.70	40	13475	50422	3.60	4.11	3.42	3.71	3.742	031	3
10.650	10.330 JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.1	8.51	17	1124	11762	10.65	10.55	10.44	10.44	10.444	018	3
1.070	1.040 WOOLLEN INDUSTRIES	11.0	7.87	11	7850	3190	1.07	1.27	1.11	1.27	1.204	265	4
1.470	1.400 INDUSTRIAL COMM. COR.	0.00	0.00	4	141	195	1.42	1.40	1.39	1.39	1.383	003	2
6.770	6.400 JOR. MORTISSED HILLS	10.3	2.87	36	15950	112580	6.77	6.83	6.48	6.48	7.058	099	4
7.210	6.500 ARAB. PHARM. MANF.	11.3	4.81	63	42922	176668	7.16	4.28	4.14	4.16	4.186	477	4
1.380	1.340 JOR. FILMS MANUFACT.	16.0	6.20	8	2150	28080	1.34	1.34	1.29	1.29	1.307	046	2
2.060	1.900 GENERAL. HEDIN	10.3	4.00	13	4250	1310	2.06	2.15	2.15	2.15	2.183	099	4
7.740	6.700 ARAB. CHIEF. DRYERS.	10.0	3.53	9	750	6102	7.04	8.54	7.29	8.20	8.436	113	4
1.280	1.230 RADA INDUSTRIES	-	0.00	1	2000	2460	1.23	1.23	1.23	1.23	1.230	133	1
5.800	5.430 DAF ALKANA COR. INV.	13.9	4.40	28	8962	50856	5.70	5.71	5.63	5.68	5.675	149	4
2.100	2.100 ARAB. AGRI. TRADING	10.0	4.00	7	750	6102	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.100	133	1

Peterhansel goes for Paris- Dakar record

TODAY AT	CINEMA TEL: 634144 PHILADELPHIA "1" <i>George Clooney & Nicole Kidman ... in</i> THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL: 634144 PHILADELPHIA "2" <i>Mickey Rourke & Angie Everhart ... in</i> ANOTHER 9-1/2 WEEKS Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL: 640428 PLAZA <i>Nicholas Cage ... in</i> CON AIR Shows: 12:30, 6:30 AL MASEER (Arabic) Nour Al Sharif Shows: 8:30, 10:45 HERCULES Shows: 2:00 p.m.	CINEMA TEL: 677420 CONCORD CONCORD "1" MR. BEAN Shows: 12:15, 2:15 MURDER 1600 Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORD "2" MR. BEAN Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL: 679 3340 GALLERIA 1 ABDOUN <i>Demi Moore ... in</i> THE JUROR Shows: 8:30, 10:30 GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE Shows: 2:00, 6:30	CINEMA TEL: 679 3340 GALLERIA 2 ABDOUN <i>Harrison Ford ... in</i> AIR FORCE ONE Shows: 2:00, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	Hisham Yanes Theatre TEL: 625155 NOW ON DAILY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE <i>Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas</i> For reservations call: 640155, 625155
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SPORTS IN BRIEF

World Cup giant slalom cancelled

VIENNA (AFP) — A World Cup men's giant slalom race scheduled for Hinterstoder, Austria, on January 6 has been cancelled because of a lack of snow. Event spokesman Gerd Fitzsch said Wednesday that the high temperatures in the region also precluded the possibility of laying an artificial piste. The FIS, skiing's international governing body, will decide on a possible replacement event over the next few days.

Palinha to return to Brazil

MADRID (AFP) — Brazilian forward Palinha is to be transferred from Spanish first division club Mallorca to Brazilian team Flamengo for a fee of \$3.4 million, Spanish sports newspaper AS reported Wednesday. Mallorca will replace Palinha by signing Argentine striker Ariel Lopez.

Shearer on target for February return

LONDON (AFP) — Injured England captain Alan Shearer said Wednesday that he is on target for a return to football within a few weeks, but laughed at reports he may make a weekend comeback. The Newcastle striker has been out of action since before the start of the season with an injury to his right ankle and says he will not play until he is fully fit. It had been reported that he could be on the bench for Newcastle's FA Cup third round match against Everton at Goodison Park. "I am not yet in full training," Shearer said. "That is some time away. When I feel I am ready, I will then have to prove my fitness to the manager." Although he kicked a ball for the first time last week, Shearer is still between a month and six weeks away from returning to first team duty and is anxious not to return to soon and jeopardise his chances of leading England in next year's World Cup finals in France.

Irwin set to return against Chelsea

LONDON (AFP) — Irish international fullback Denis Irwin is set to make his Manchester United comeback in the FA Cup third-round match against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on Sunday after passing a fitness test by completing a reserve match. Irwin played the full 90 minutes in a 1-1 draw against Leeds on Tuesday night after recovering from a knee ligament injury. Irwin has been out of action for eight weeks after suffering the injury in a controversial tackle by Feyenoord's Paul Bosvelt in a European Champions' League match. His return is particularly timely for manager Alex Ferguson after United lost Phil Neville — who had been deputising for Irwin at left-back — through suspension and Norwegian international Ronny Johnsen, who played in the position against Coventry at the weekend, with a thigh injury.

Weah undergoes successful surgery

MILAN (AFP) — AC Milan's former FIFA world player of the year George Weah underwent a successful hernia operation, it was announced here on Tuesday, which will put him out for two months. The former Paris Saint Germain striker, who had to pull out of a club friendly in Israel, was operated on by Professor Alessandro Duciari after he had been advised by the AC Milan doctor to have the surgery after a longstanding back injury failed to clear up — he last played for Milan in the 2-0 win over Bari on November 23. Weah, who has scored just three goals in 13 appearances this season, refused to reveal any details about the operation but assured the club's directors that he would hold a press conference later in the week to explain his current state of fitness. Veteran Italian striker Maurizio Ganz, recently transferred from city rivals Inter, looks likely to replace the Liberian alongside Dutch strike partner Patrick Kluivert.

Winter has fractured cheekbone

PALERMO (AFP) — Dutch international midfielder Aron Winter is expected to be out of action for several weeks after suffering a fractured cheekbone in a friendly match. Winter was injured during Inter Milan's 3-0 win over French club Auxerre in a friendly match on Tuesday and had to be hospitalised. The diagnosis was made Wednesday after Winter was examined by medical staff.

Souness captures second signing of week

LISBON (AFP) — Benfica coach Graeme Souness made his second major

signing of the week when he signed Ukrainian midfielder Sergei Kandorov for a million dollars from Israeli side Maccabi Haifa here on Tuesday. The 25-year-old Kandorov, who signed a three-and-a-half year contract, looks likely to join Souness' other recent signing Czech Republic star Karel Poborsky, who completed his move from Premiership side Manchester United on Monday, in the line-up for the vital clash with fellow Portuguese giants Porto next Saturday.

Bulgaria arrange Argentinian friendly

SOFIA (AFP) — The 1994 World Cup semi-finalists Bulgaria will play fellow World Cup finalists and dual World Cup winners Argentina in a friendly as a build up towards the 1998 finals it was confirmed here on Tuesday. Bulgaria, who beat defending champions Germany on their way to the 1994 semi-finals, will play the 1978 and 1986 champions in Argentina on March 11. The Bulgarians see Argentina as ideal opposition as they have been drawn with South American side Paraguay in Group D along with Spain and Nigeria — in what is popularly known as the 'Group of Death'. The Argentinians are in Group H with first-time qualifiers Croatia, Jamaica and Japan.

Brolin accepts Crystal Palace offer

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — Former Swedish international star Tomas Brolin is set to accept English Premiership side Crystal Palace's offer to train with them, it was claimed here on Tuesday. The 28-year-old Brolin, who played in two World Cup finals, inspiring Sweden to the 1994 semi-finals, is due to start training with the struggling Premiership side this week, according to the Swedish newspaper Expressen. Palace boss Steve Coppell, who was frustrated in his attempt to sign Brolin at the beginning of the season because Leeds United, who hold his registration, asked too much, had offered the fallen star a chance to revive his career on December 19 — albeit till the end of the season. "I think realistically he is only going to commit himself until the end of the season and we probably only have a need until the end of the season," Coppell said. "But at least we give him an opportunity to re-establish himself. I think he is only 28 but he has got a lot to do." He's been out of the game for close to three months so he's got to look for the best opportunity he can to show that he's a top quality player. "It's not a gamble because we wouldn't be paying anything for him. We're providing him with a short-term opportunity," Coppell added. Brolin moved to Leeds from Italian club Parma in 1995 but he failed to shine. Wilkinson and subsequently George Graham struggled to control Brolin amid reports of weight and attitude problems and he has not played since leaving Elland Road in acrimonious circumstances.

Chovanec to become Czech coach

PRAGUE (AFP) — Sparta Prague coach Jozef Chovanec is set to become boss of the Czech Republic national side after his club said they would release him here on Tuesday. The 37-year-old Chovanec, capped over 50 times for his country, should be confirmed as Dusan Uhrin's replacement on January 8 — Uhrin, 54, led the national side to the 1996 European Championship final and was last in charge for the Confederations Cup earlier this month. Sparta Prague gave their permission to Chovanec's appointment after Frantisek Chvalovsky, President of the Czech football federation, approached them on Monday. Chovanec, who played most of his club football for Sparta, with a spell at Dutch giants PSV Eindhoven, will join up with fellow former Czech international Ivan Hasek, who has been appointed general manager, in the national set-up. The 34-year-old Hasek, who played in the 1990 World Cup finals where the old Czechoslovakia reached the quarter-finals, has signed a contract which will take him up to the 2002 World Cup finals to be co-hosted by South Korea and Japan — where he finished his playing career.

Austrian domination may ease in next ski races

BORMIO, Italy (AP) — The Austrian domination in the men's world cup, capped by a double triumph in consecutive downhill at Bormio this week, may be easing in the next gate events to the relief of frustrated opponents.

A slalom and a giant slalom come next at Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, on Jan. 3-4 with Michael Von Gruenigen, Finn Christian Jagge, Jure Kosir and Alberto Tomba as likely protagonists.

In eight of 12 men's races held so far this season it has been up to the skiers of Austria's "power team" to be in front.

"They look almost unbeatable right now," said Norway's Lasse Kjus, who prevented an all-Austrian podium Tuesday by placing third.

"The Austrians overpowered the competition," said Kristian Ghedina, who was among the big losers at Bormio after winning the opening season downhill at Beaver Creek.

"They are eager to win, to get a place on the Olympic team, the rivalry within the Austrian team is causing more problems to us than pressure on them," Ghedina added.

Italy's most successful downhiller with eight career wins, Ghedina finished 14th and 16th in the two speed races at the home track Monday and Tuesday.

On Monday, World cup leader Hermann Maier led an Austrian sweep of the top four places.

In the next Andreas Schifferer, Monday's runner-up by only three hundredths of a second, edged teammate Werner Franz in a 1-2 Austrian finish.

Austrian skiers have made the podium (top three) in all but one race so far. Gate events may stop their winning streak (three in the last three races). However giant slalom and slalom specialists such as Christian Mayer, Thomas Stangassinger and Thomas Sykora still could keep the Austrian flag flying high.

Austria can also rely on its newest star, Maier, who has been winning in all World Cup disciplines except slalom.

With three season wins — and a fourth stripped because of a controversial finish line stunt — Maier commands the overall standings with 639 points, 157 ahead of another Austrian, Stefan Eberharter.

Austrian skiers also lead world cup standings of their favourite disciplines — downhill and Super-G.

In Slovenia, in the first races of the Olympic year, Von Gruenigen will be shooting for his third season victory in giant slalom. The moustachioed Swiss, the world giant slalom champion, already won in Val d'Isere and Tignes, France.

Jagge, the Norwegian who captured an Olympic slalom title in 1992, is in top form and already showed it by winning a night slalom at Sestriere earlier this month.

Tomba, the Italian ski superstar, placed fourth at Sestriere in his best season showing, however he's gradually regaining condition and confidence and promised to make a New Year's gift to Italian fans in Slovenia.

A three-time Olympic champion, 31-year-old Tomba will compete in his fourth winter games at Nagano in February.

Muster on standby for doubtful Philippoussis in Kooyong Classic

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Former French Open champion Thomas Muster is on standby to play in the Kooyong Classic here next month if injury forces hometown star Mark Philippoussis to withdraw.

Philippoussis has suffered a recurrence of a shoulder injury and Tuesday announced he had withdrawn from next week's Australian hardcourt championship in Adelaide.

There also has to be a question mark over his fitness for the Australian Open, the year's first grand slam, starting here on January 19, the week after the Classic.

It would be a severe blow to Philippoussis if he were to be forced out of the Open before his home fans for a second successive year. Last year he pulled out because of tendinitis in his right arm.

The latest injury affects his ability to serve flat out which is the key weapon in his game.

Classic promoter Colin Stubs said Wednesday that the world No.18 had tried to serve at full strength at the weekend but had pulled up sore.

"It's really just a wait-and-see situation," Stubs said.

Stubs said that if Philippoussis was forced out of the Kooyong Classic, starting on January 1-4, the most likely replacement would be Austria's Muster.

"There are quite a few players lined up wanting to play, including Andrei



Thomas Muster

Medvedev, but Muster would be the most likely one to step in," Stubs said.

Philippoussis, 21, is expected to be replaced in Adelaide by the French Open champion Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil, who will also line up at Kooyong.

SCOREBOARD

English League

First Division
Norwich City 2 Portsmouth 0

Scottish League

First Division
Hamilton Academicals 0 Airdrie 0

NBA

Indiana	109	New Jersey	91
Miami	90	Cleveland	78
Detroit	100	Toronto	95
Minnesota	99	Chicago	95
New York	84	Orlando	79
Milwaukee	105	Dallas	98
Utah	132	Denver	99
Phoenix	100	Boston	90
Portland	96	Philadelphia	86
San Antonio	124	Vancouver	115
Seattle	101	Golden State	87
LA Lakers	93	Sacramento	80

Friendly soccer match

Inter Milan 3 Auxerre 0

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNIAH HIRSCH

MAKE SURE OF THE ENTRIES

North-South vulnerable. West deals.

NORTH		EAST	
♠ 4	♠ 8	♠ 5	♠ 10
♥ 9	♥ 7	♥ 4	♥ 6
♦ 10	♦ 6	♦ 10	♦ 8
♣ 10	♣ 9	♣ 10	♣ 8

The bidding:
WEST: 1♠, 2♠, 3NT, 4NT
NORTH: 1♠, 2♠, 3NT, 4NT
EAST: 1♠, 2♠, 3NT, 4NT
SOUTH: 1♠, 2♠, 3NT, 4NT

Opening lead: Six of ♣
When you hold a combined sequence of cards such as J 10 9 8 7 of clubs on this hand, they are called 'equals' in the trade. However, that does not mean it makes no difference which you play to a particular trick, as this deal demonstrates.
South had a difficult bidding problem on the second round. A jump to two spades was one option, but would have overemphasized the

suit and probably have ended the auction. Two no trump was a practical choice, and it led to a game contract which the bidding made an odd-on chance.
West led a fourth-best heart. East rose with the ace and continued with the jack to declarer's king. Once West was marked with the queen of hearts by the play to the first two tricks, East became a heavy favorite to hold the queen of clubs. Successful finesses in both minors would allow declarer to score two spades, one heart, two diamonds and four clubs.
The only fly in the ointment was a possible 4-1 club break. However, declarer found a way to counter that by making use of the equals in the suit in dummy. To the third trick declarer led the jack of clubs and overtook with the ace. Next came the ten of clubs, declarer unblocking the eight. This foresight was rewarded when West showed out.

Declarer was able to continue with the nine of clubs, and East was a goner. If the defender covered, declarer would win with king, return to dummy by leading the two of clubs to the seven, and take the diamond finesse. If East did not cover the nine of clubs, declarer would abandon the suit for the moment in favor of the diamond finesse. Either way, nine tricks were there.

Villeuneuve suffers concussion on piste

GRENOBLE (AFP) — Canada's Formula One world champion Jacques Villeneuve suffered concussion after falling while skiing on Wednesday.

Bruno Vaginat, mayor of Praloup where the accident took place, told AFP that the 26-year-old Villeneuve was flown by helicopter to hospital where he was held for several hours as he was feeling 'groggy'.

"He was slightly concussed which required several hours of rest," a Praloup spokesman said.

Villeneuve, who added the Formula One championship to the 1995 IndyCar title after main rival Michael Schumacher went off in the final Grand Prix of the season, later left to celebrate the New Year with a group of friends in Switzerland.



During the month of Ramadan, we will be offering you a tasty buffet with all the Middle Eastern Iftar specialties, including a traditional juice server. To create the special Arabic atmosphere, our Philadelphia Hall will be completely decorated according to the Arabic bedouin theme.

Buffet is served from sunset to 9.00 pm.

To complete this traditional event, the Philadelphia Hotel will also offer you every night: Live music, a fortune teller, a comedian and Hubble Bubbly in a completely decorated bar and lounge.

Open from 6.00 pm

Home away from home, but then so much more special. That is what we will offer you this month. So please come and enjoy this special evening out, with your family, a group of friends or anyone you would like to invite.

For table reservations, please contact the Banqueting office at tel.: 607700. On request, we have special group discounts.

Philadelphia Hotel Radisson PEPSI

Israeli army's chief rabbi demanded destruction of Dome of the Rock in 1967

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A former Israeli chief rabbi tried to convince military commanders to destroy the Dome of the Rock Mosque in Arab east Jerusalem shortly after Israel occupied the sector in the 1967 war, the Haaretz newspaper reported Wednesday.

The late General Uzi Narkiss, who led Israeli troops into Arab east Jerusalem in June 1967, told Haaretz in an interview before his death earlier this month that Rabbi Shlomo Goren pressed him to blow the mosque up "with 100 kilograms of explosives."

Goren, who was the army's chief rabbi at the time, insisted that the army had to profit from the "unique occasion" of its military victory in occupying Arab east Jerusalem "to get rid of this thing once and for all."

The rabbi's aim was to rebuild the Jewish temple which allegedly had stood on the raised platform now holding the Dome of the

Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque until its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Narkiss, who gave the tape-recorded interview in May but asked that it not be published until after his death, said he told the rabbi to "knock it off."

He told the Haaretz that he had to threaten to throw the rabbi into jail to get him to stop pressing for the Mosque's destruction.

Muslim tradition holds that the Dome of the Rock was built on the spot from where the Prophet Mohammad ascended to heaven. The Mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina.

Goren later became Israel's chief rabbi and often publicly expressed his regret that the army had not destroyed the Dome of the Rock, although he never admitted having personally demanded such action in 1967.

The rabbi, who died in October 1994, was well known for his extremist

views, once calling publicly for the murder of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

The revelation of Rabbi Goren's bid to destroy the Dome of the Rock coincided with Israeli police warnings that certain right-wing Jewish groups have been plotting assaults on the mosque complex to coincide with the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan, which began Tuesday.

Police arrested two Jewish militants last week on suspicion they had planned to throw a pig's head wrapped in pages of the Koran into the Mosque compound after weekly Muslim prayers on Friday.

Their aim, according to the police, was to spark Arab-Israeli violence that would prevent the government from carrying out a promised troop withdrawal from more of the West Bank.

Police have in the past thwarted several attempts by Jewish radicals to destroy the Dome of the Rock or Al Aqsa Mosque.

Lawyer for Israeli extremist asks for her immediate release

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The attorney for a Jewish militant convicted of racial incitement for drawing posters depicting the Prophet Mohammad as a pig asked Wednesday that his client be sentenced only to time already served in jail.

At a pre-sentencing hearing in a Jerusalem court, Tatiana Susskin, 26, showed the first signs of regret for her action, which sparked rioting in the West Bank city of Hebron and outrage in the Muslim World last June.

"I didn't want to offend Muslim feelings, I am not a racist and do not intend to again commit the actions I am accused of," Susskin told the court.

When Susskin was found guilty Tuesday of racism, attempting to offend religious feelings and assault for stoning an Arab car, she defiantly declared "I don't

regret anything I've done." Susskin, who emigrated from Russia six years ago and became a follower of the outlawed anti-Arab group Kach, faces up to 26 years in jail.

Sentencing was set for Jan. 8.

At Wednesday's hearing, defence lawyer Schmuel Kasper said there were ample legal precedents in Israel of persons charged with similar crimes being sentenced to only several months in prison.

He also argued that while Susskin admitted drawing the poster showing Mohammad as a pig trampling on the Koran, there was no evidence she actually pasted the pictures up in Hebron as accused.

He added that the "psychological fragility" of his client and her previously clean criminal record should be considered in sentencing.

Susskin was arrested on June 28 and has already served five and a half months pending her trial.

"If she receives less than one year in prison, it would mean that with the time already served, plus time off for good conduct and the fact that she has spent months in solitary confinement she should be released immediately," Mr. Kasper said.

"Miss Susskin has already served two or even three times the maximum sentence she deserves," he said.

State prosecutor Elie Aharvanel requested no specific sentence, saying only that Susskin "should be given a punishment that shows there are limits which must not be crossed."

He said the defendant had shown during her trial that she is "perfectly sane and able to understand the difference between right and wrong."

Jew battles Jew over way of life in Israel

By Laurie Copans
Agence France Presse

PETAH TIKVA — As Israel gears up to celebrate its 50th birthday, battles between secular and religious Jews are erupting across the country for control of neighbourhoods where the two communities used to live harmoniously.

In a worrisome escalation, firebombs were thrown before dawn Wednesday at a makeshift religious seminary erected recently in a secular neighbourhood of Pardess Hanna, a town outside the northern Israeli city of Haifa, police said.

The ultra-Orthodox director of the school immediately blamed the attack on secular residents of the town who have been battling incursions into their community by the Haredi community of fundamentalist Jews.

The secular founders of Israel envisaged a country where all Jews were welcome and free to exercise their own way of life.

But as the power of religious parties has grown, secular Israelis increasingly complain they are being forced to live by the strict religious rules observed by Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews.

At a park in this Tel Aviv suburb, secular and religious children play together, unaware that the plot of land has been turned into another religious battleground.

Secular Petah Tikva residents warn that violence will erupt if their religious neighbours succeed in plans to build a synagogue on part of the park, one of the few in a

one-kilometre square area where there are already eight synagogues.

A fist-fight already broke out between secular residents and an engineer working for the religious community who arrived to survey the land last week.

"I was born here 54 years ago and relations between the secular and religious have always been good," said Haim Avieli, a secular resident.

"But if the synagogue is built here, secular children will no longer be able to play soccer or ring toss here on the Sabbath [Saturdays]," Mr. Avieli told AFP. Playing games on the Sabbath is forbidden for observant Jews.

"There will be blood and fire before we let that happen," he added.

Liberal Jews say the discord, which has gradually increased in recent years, skyrocketed after the religious parties won 23 seats in parliament and a major place in the governing coalition in 1996 elections.

"The religious have received so much power and have become ambitious, trying to take over in different areas around the country," said Joseph Paritzky, chairman of A Free People, a group created to stop the imposition of religious lifestyles in secular areas.

Most of the battles centre around the Sabbath when practising Jews do not use electricity, drive cars or shop.

Religious Jews insist that Israel was established to preserve the Jewish faith, and the ultra-Orthodox believe that to accomplish this, all Jews must be brought to

observe religious law or Halakha.

But secular Jews say Israel is and should remain a democracy, no matter how strong the religious parties become.

"Why can't the religious agree to respect us and let us open a shop in our secular neighbourhood on the Sabbath if we want," Mr. Paritzky added.

Like many non-observant Jews around the country, Mr. Avieli charges that local officials are bending to the demands of the religious in hopes of obtaining their votes when municipal elections are held next November.

Acting Petah Tikva mayor Paltiel Eisenthal, of the National Religious Party, denies the accusation, insisting that the leaders are only providing for the growing religious community.

"They [secular Jews] say they don't want a fascist country but they are starting the war when they don't even want to let us build a synagogue," Mr. Eisenthal told AFP.

In Pardess Hanna, south of Haifa, 100 almost entirely secular families who recently bought cottages in a new section of town were shocked to awake one morning to find the religious seminary had been established in their midst without authorisation by local planning officials.

Residents say the town mayor allowed the seminary to open in order not to jeopardise millions of dollars the community receives from the interior ministry, which is currently controlled by the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party.



RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR IN LONDON: An ice sculpture with large numbers signifying the arrival of 1998 is erected by staff of the Dorchester Hotel in London Wednesday. Vast crowds are expected to crowd into Trafalgar Square and other landmarks and pubs around Britain to ring in the New Year (Reuters photo)

Washington ready to improve 'oil for food' deal with Baghdad

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States is ready "to do everything possible" to improve food and medicine distribution in Iraq under an improved U.N. "oil for food" deal, the U.S. State Department said Tuesday.

And Washington "will be prepared to act immediately" on a report from U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, expected in early 1998, on how to improve delivery of humanitarian aid, said State Department spokesman James Foley.

Mr. Foley stressed that U.S. officials "believe the blame [for distribution delays] is 100 per cent on [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein's shoulders" and accused Iraq of reducing purchases of basic goods for its people.

President Hussein "has continued to plough resources into areas that have nothing to do with meeting the humanitarian needs of his own people," said Mr. Foley, pointing to "the proliferation of so-called presidential palaces."

And Mr. Foley said Baghdad delayed the delivery of milk to Iraqi children

by refusing to follow the established procedure for U.N. approval of "oil for food" contracts.

He emphasised that Washington gave the go-ahead to a contract for delivery of powdered baby formula proposed by Tunisia Dec. 23 even though the contract overstepped the bounds set by the "oil for food" deal.

Iraqi Trade Minister Mohammad Mahdi Saleh on Tuesday blamed the U.S. for blocking fulfilment of the accord, calling Washington "the world's biggest liar."

The Iraqi official said the U.N. sanctions committee had yet to approve a \$562,000 contract to buy 200 tonnes of milk from Tunisia.

Baghdad has repeatedly accused British and U.S. officials on the U.N. Sanctions Committee of blocking or delaying contracts under the "oil-for-food" deal, which went into effect in Dec. 26.

The third phase of the oil-for-food programme was renewed by the U.N. Security Council this month for another six months. But

1997 was the 'year of defeats' for U.S., says Iraqi paper

BAGHDAD (AFP) — An Iraqi official newspaper on Wednesday proclaimed 1997 the year of defeat for the United States, saying Baghdad had managed to muster greater international support against Washington.

"1997 is the year of U.S. defeats, we no longer stand alone in resisting the evil dictatorship of the United States," wrote Al Jumhuriya.

"We became part of a worldwide movement whose main aim is to clip the wings of the United States and reduce its role," the paper said, adding that 1998 would be a year of "further victories" in that direction.

Iraq boasts that it has succeeded in driving a wedge between Britain and the U.S. on one hand and China, France and Russia on the other, on how to respond to Baghdad's refusal to allow U.N. weapons experts inspect its presidential palaces.

Washington and London have not ruled out any military option to force Baghdad to open up its palaces to inspections, while the three other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are opposed to the use of force.

Iraq stopped selling oil under the programme to protest late deliveries of supplies. The programme permits Iraq to sell up to \$2 billion of oil every six months to ease the impact of trade sanctions the U.N. put on Baghdad following its invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Security alert in Istanbul following bomb attack

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Istanbul police stepped up security throughout the city Wednesday, following a powerful bomb blast that seriously injured five people.

The bomb ripped through a suburban train on Istanbul's European side on Tuesday. Nobody immediately claimed responsibility for the blast, which came amid interior ministry warnings of possible attacks by Islamist groups during New Year celebrations which this year coincided with the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Thousands of police took part in a massive sweep overnight Tuesday, focusing on tourist sites, night clubs and places where alcohol is sold.

More than 120 people, including six foreigners, were arrested in the operation.

Meanwhile, Istanbul police chief Hassan Ozdemir called on residents to be especially vigilant over the New Year period and to report any suspicious packages to the authorities.

Tourist sites and alcohol outlets are believed to be most vulnerable to attacks by Islamists, and plainclothes police will be deployed in hotels and discos holding New Year celebrations.

Similar measures have been taken in other Turkish cities, including the capital Ankara, where 2,000 police will be mobilised to keep order.

Iranian president to address Americans in TV interview

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's President Mohammad Khatami is to address the American people next week in an interview with Cable News Network (CNN), media sources said here Wednesday.

CNN journalist Christiane Amanpour and her camera crew are expected to arrive next week for the interview which is likely to take place on Tuesday or Wednesday, they said.

It will be President Khatami's first interview with a member of the American news media since his election in May.

Mr. Khatami said in mid-December that he planned to address "the great American people shortly," but did not divulge the contents of his speech.

Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said later the president would tell the Americans about the U.S. government's "misrepresentation of Iranian people in the past 50 years."

The U.S. government said earlier this month that it would closely watch to see what President Khatami had to say.

But headline newspapers in Iran have cautioned the U.S. not to jump to any conclusion, and warned there has been no change in the Islamic

Khatami sends Saddam greetings for Ramadan

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami has sent Iraqi President Saddam Hussein goodwill greetings to mark the Holy Month of Ramadan, the first such message since the start of the Iran-Iraq war 17 years ago, the official Iraqi news agency INA said Wednesday.

"We wish all the best for all Muslims... and hope that Allah helps us to realise peace and happiness," Mr. Khatami said in his message, INA reported.

President Khatami, a relative moderate who took office in August, has called for an improvement in relations between Iran and neighbouring Arab states.

At the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit in Tehran earlier this month, Mr. Khatami called on Iraq's leaders to "forget the past and turn over a new page in relations" between the two states.

Iran News. "The United States has to have a realistic approach and realise Iran has a pluralistic system" of government, he said. "America has to acknowledge that Iran is a dynamic country and cannot be isolated."

Tehran and Washington broke diplomatic ties after the 1979 Islamist revolution which toppled the pro-American Shah. The two countries have been at daggers drawn ever since.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif said Mr. Khatami's statements would "promote dialogue" between the two peoples but said "unfounded allegations against the Islamic Republic" must be withdrawn.

"The American people's misconception about Iran must be corrected and the U.S. government should seriously revise its policies" towards the Islamic Republic, he told the English-language newspaper

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Mir cosmonauts allowed sip of cognac for New Year

MOSCOW (AFP) — Cosmonauts on board the ageing Russian space station Mir will be allowed to break the rules and have a sip of cognac to celebrate the New Year, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported. Flight Control Director Viktor Blagov said champagne could not be transported on board as the bubbly would explode in the craft. He said although alcohol is banned on Mir cosmonauts manage to take a small quantity on board with the approval of flight officials who did not want to deprive them of the small pleasures of life.

First Dog's executive privilege on Virgin Islands

CHARLOTTE AMALIE (R) — The Sand Dollar Vacation Villa on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas usually has a strict "no pets" policy. But Buddy, a Labrador, is not just any pet. Dolly Grebluk, who owns the Sand Dollar, said she would waive the "no pets" policy to allow President Bill Clinton to bring his new puppy with him when he flies to the U.S. Virgin Islands on Thursday for a brief vacation. "How can we refuse the First Dog?" she asked. While Buddy is visiting the Caribbean, the First Cat, Socks, was expected to stay behind at the White House.

City employee loses job for crossing street

NEW YORK (AP) — A young New York City employee learned a costly lesson this week: don't cross Mayor Rudolph Giuliani when you're crossing the street. David Vidal, 24-year-old college intern with the mayor's Juvenile Justice Commissioner, was forced to resign when he flouted Giuliani's plan to keep pedestrians from blocking downtown Manhattan traffic during the holidays.

"Nonsensical laws mean nothing to me," the student bragged to a reporter after he walked around a police barrier to get across a street. The next thing he knew, he was out of a job.

Woody Allen's gift to bride is a part in a stage play

NEW YORK (AFP) — U.S. movie director Woody Allen is writing an off-Broadway play featuring a part for his new wife, Soon-Yi Previn. The New York Post said on Wednesday, Soon-Yi, 27, who has been taken private acting classes since October, will have a supporting role in the as-yet-untitled play, said the newspaper, citing a friend of the couple. Allen, 62, wed Soon-Yi on Dec. 23 in Venice. She is the adopted daughter of his former girlfriend, actress Mia Farrow, and orchestra conductor Andre Previn.

Sir Elton speaks of 'immeasurable joy' over knighthood

LONDON (AFP) — A knighthood for pop singer Elton John and awards for four other people closely associated with the late Princess of Wales to Britain's New Year honours list were hailed by Britain's tabloid press Wednesday as "Diana's honours." After learning of the knighthood, the 50-year-old singer, who will now be known as Sir Elton, said his joy was "immeasurable." Many saw the awards as a unique tribute to the memory of the princess who died in a Paris car crash in August. John's singing of "Candle in the Wind" at her funeral struck a chord with a grieving Britain and has earned more than \$34 million.

Italy to back Kurdish rights internationally

ROME (AFP) — Italy will look favourably on requests for political asylum from illegal Kurdish immigrants and raise the question of the Kurds' human rights in international forums, Interior Minister Giorgio Napolitano said Tuesday.

Mr. Napolitano said that persecution of the Kurds was a reality, and that under the

Dublin Convention requests for political asylum should be examined by an individual's first country of embarkation.

His remarks followed the arrival of more than 800 illegal immigrants Saturday near Catanzaro in southern Italy after their ship ran aground. None so far has sought political asylum.

Local authorities in

Catanzaro said a new count had established that 826 people, and not 835, had arrived aboard the Turkish-registered ship Arafat, and that not all were Kurds.